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THE ART OF

*Play*

*Production*





*The Art of*  
PLAY  
PRODUCTION

R E V I S E D   E D I T I O N

BY  
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the University of Pennsylvania*



HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS

NEW YORK *and* LONDON

**THE ART OF PLAY PRODUCTION, REVISED EDITION**

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D-K

## TO MY MOTHER

Whose parents were players; who made her first stage appearance at the age of five months, played many children's parts, and retired at the age of eight; whose lifelong knowledge of the theatre was the first source of this book; and who, at the age of eighty-five, is still my best critic.



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(Color Plate)

*facing p. 344*

## *Preface*

THIS book is for the beginner, but not for the dabbler. It does not presuppose any previous experience in play production, but it does presuppose a realization that the art of good play production is not to be learned in a day; that it is, in fact, a lifetime study, to be approached with humility and patience.

In the eighteen years since the book was first published, the standards of excellence in school, college, and community theatre production have risen considerably. It is true that the films have largely replaced the professional "road" theatres as popular entertainment outside of the larger cities—so much so that our wartime camp shows gave many service men their first glimpse of "round actors." But for that very reason the people in the smaller communities who crave real theatre, and who still prefer round actors to pictures, have given increasing support to amateur, educational, and semi-professional theatre groups. Many thousands of such groups are now operating in this country—more than all the professional road companies in their palmyest days; hundreds of them are strongly organized and highly expert, and most people know that their expertness is achieved only by study, experience, and hard work.

It has therefore seemed even less necessary than before to address this book to the well-meaning but half-hearted beginner who would like to stage a play for the firemen's carnival or the mothers' club social, and wants somebody to tell him briefly in words of one syllable just how to turn the trick. It is addressed, rather—even more seriously than before—to the ambitious amateur who wants to learn how to work with, or to build up, a permanent and artistic producing group; to the student with professional aims who wishes to approach his life work thoughtfully as well as practically; to the student of liberal arts, in or out of school, who would like to enhance his appreciation of the theatre in relation to other arts; and to the teacher at any school level who is called upon to teach theatre or produce plays.

It is addressed to the amateur rather than the professional solely because it is the amateur who is most often the beginner and who needs the most help; but there is no implication that amateur production is neces-



sarily inferior to professional, or that it is essentially different in its artistic aims. Good theatre is good theatre, whether the actors act for a living or for love of the work. That even the professional player may gain by a modest approach is attested by the fact that more and more of the best younger players now reach their profession by way of college or community theatre experience.

The continued demand for the book after so many years, in spite of out-dated allusions and illustrations, has encouraged me to keep its basic features substantially unchanged. A few practical-minded readers have suggested omitting the first four chapters, which deal with the artistic principles upon which the practical techniques are founded; but a very large majority of the users questioned have regarded those chapters as the most important in the book, and have urged their retention. The entire text has been rewritten, with the addition of much new material and the substitution of more recent illustrative examples, except where the older examples have no recent counterparts. The chapter on modern tendencies in scenic art has been considerably revised, and the old chapter on amateur stagecraft has been replaced by two entirely new chapters, enlarging the treatment, bringing it more nearly up to date, and—I hope—making it more useful, especially to groups with limited budgets. The major emphasis of the book is, however, still on directing and acting, rather than on scenic background, and upon teamwork rather than individual virtuosity.

The line cuts in the text have been largely redrawn, with some deletions and more additions. The half-tone illustrations—except for the one color plate—are entirely new to the book, and many of them new to publication; they are also much more numerous than before. If there is a disproportionate number of illustrations from my own productions and those of my friends it is because of a desire to illustrate principles accurately without excessive repetition of material available in other publications. But I have not hesitated to use familiar scenes from Broadway or familiar historical examples when they seemed more illustrative. Credits, where due, will be found in the list of illustrations.

It is a pleasure to repeat my acknowledgment of indebtedness, in no way lessened by the revision, to Professor Reese James, the late Professor Percy Van Dyke Shelly, Professor Arthur Hobson Quinn, and Mr. Benja-

min Rothberg, all of whom gave material help on the original manuscript. In connection with the revision I wish especially to acknowledge the able assistance of Miss Lousene Rousseau, and the many courtesies of Mr. George Freedley.

JOHN DOLMAN, JR.

*Philadelphia*

*September, 1945*



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## CHAPTER I



### *Introduction*

THE theatre of today embraces so many forms of activity that an exact definition of the director's problems and responsibilities is hardly possible. There are many different kinds of plays and many different methods of producing them. There are literary plays, escapist plays, and plays of "social significance"—sometimes more concerned with propaganda than with art; there are operas, pantomimes, musical comedies, reviews, ballets, and variety shows, all of which belong to the theatre in its broadest sense; there are talking pictures, radio plays, and television plays, all calling for differences of technique. There are realistic plays, in which the theatre tries desperately to compete with the expensive realism of the movies; there are stylistic and imaginative plays; and there are experiments in theatrical abstraction, sometimes on the part of directors and designers, more recently on the part of the dramatists themselves—notably Saroyan and Wilder.

In the years immediately following World War I a great deal was heard about "the new movement in the theatre," or "the theatre of tomorrow," as if a definite change were taking place, with definite objectives. It is now clear that there is no such thing as "the" new movement in the theatre. The theatre, like most other aspects of life, has simply entered into an experimental age—an age of restless inquiry, provocative criticism, and inventive ingenuity in both art and mechanics. Never in history were there so many kinds of theatre, good and bad; never in history were theatre-goers so uncertain in their minds as to what constitutes good theatre. Never was commercialism carried to such fantastic extremes as in modern "show business"—yet never were there as many successful and well-organized non-commercial theatres in the world. Never, in other words, was the theatre as heterogeneous as it is today.

Nevertheless, it is fair to say that the continuing tendency of the twentieth-century theatre is to place more emphasis on the work of the director than at almost any previous period of theatre history.

## THE DIRECTOR AS ARTIST

In the art of play production, to use the narrower sense of the word "play," it is the author who supplies the principal idea, determines the purpose, and functions in general as the original creative artist. But it is very generally agreed that a play is not a play until it is realized upon the stage, however important it may be as pure literature. From the standpoint of the theatre the written or printed text is merely a set of instructions telling the director, the actors, and the technical staff how to go about the task of giving life to the play. The art of the theatre is not an individual art; it is essentially a group art, in which the author, the director, the scenic artist, the actors, the musicians, the stage crew, and even the audience all contribute to a common creative effort. It is the director, therefore, rather than the author, who is responsible for the finished product. The author, even when he is his own director, can hardly foresee all the conditions and problems that may arise in the course of production. What he does as author is suggestive but not necessarily conclusive, and it remains for the whole group, working under the director's guidance, to carry the creative effort to its full realization.

In this sense, then, the director is as much a creative artist as the author himself, and must share the author's creative attitude. No amount of technical knowledge or facile craftsmanship will take the place of a true grasp of the author's purpose. Not infrequently a new play is half rewritten at rehearsals, and even though the director may do none of the actual rewriting it is often his feeling for the play as a whole that serves to bring out the need of revision and to suggest the manner. No director can be expected to make a good play out of an idea that is in its inception hopelessly bad, but he can be, and often is, expected to make a finished play out of a very rough and unfinished text. Often, too, he is expected to take a play that was written for other times and conditions, and adapt it for a new type of production and a new audience. If not a dramatist he must at least be a competent "play doctor."

From the creative point of view it becomes evident that the first business of the stage director is to understand the nature and purpose of the drama as an art; and to understand this clearly he must know something of the fine arts in general—especially of their purpose.

## THE NATURE OF THE FINE ARTS

The fine arts may be described as those activities which exist primarily for the purpose of giving æsthetic pleasure—that is, pleasure dependent upon the appreciation of beauty. There are, of course, many different notions as to what constitutes beauty; one person may find his conception of it in a vivid sunset, another in a tragic poem, and another in a particularly smooth-running gasoline engine. Some enjoy beauty only in connection with utility or with social purpose; others prefer it alone and for its own sake. But the power to appreciate some sort of beauty is almost universal; hence the wide appeal of the fine arts, and the wide variety of different arts to satisfy different natures.

For a proper understanding of the fine arts, then, one must keep in mind their common æsthetic purpose. But that alone is not enough. One must also be able to discern, through all the variations of subject matter, method, and technique, a single common principle governing the relationship of art to life: the principle of conventionalization. The fine arts, despite their differences, are all alike in that they offer us, not life itself, but a representation of life in terms of artistic conventions. Perhaps “representation” is too narrow a word; some artists insist that art should be a presentation rather than a representation; others that it should be a reading or interpretation of life, or a criticism of life, or a direct expression of the artist’s thought or feeling. It is not necessary to settle this question, or to insist upon an exact definition of the term convention. Obviously the conventions are different for different arts, both in kind and in degree. It is, however, the principle of conventionalization that distinguishes art from reality.

Thus the fine art of painting aims to give æsthetic pleasure by representing or expressing life through the convention of line, mass, and color on a flat surface; there is no actual movement and no actual depth, though both, of course, are suggested. The fine art of sculpture usually leaves out color, or reduces it to a conventional monotone; it leaves out movement also, but retains depth. Photography ordinarily leaves out color, depth, and movement, but is so accurate in other respects that the artistic photographer usually finds it necessary to use some screening or defocusing process to eliminate unessential detail; or if he follows the



current trend toward sharp definition he offsets it by the use of odd lighting or queer angle shots. With brush or crayon it is hard to imitate nature accurately, but with the camera the difficulty is to avoid being *too* natural. It is significant that whenever artistic representation becomes too natural it ceases to be artistic. Thus we find that natural color photography has not proved popular as a fine art. It is very useful for giving us a truer vision of unfamiliar scenes, as in the *National Geographic Magazine*, or for treasuring the memory of beautiful things like last summer's garden or a colorful stage setting, but it is not in itself an effective means of creating beauty artistically. It is too much like life. So, as a rule, is colored statuary, especially when the coloring is natural and the statue life size.<sup>1</sup> In the imitation of reality there must always be some element of *unreality*—not untruth, but exaggeration, understatement, or simplification—or the result, no matter how beautiful as life, does not appeal to us as art.

It will be noted that all of the arts mentioned conventionalize by retaining some of the elements of life as naturally as possible and boldly rejecting others as unessential. Their technique is based upon the simple principle of *selection*. The art of literature in general, and the art of the drama as generally understood, belong in the same class.

#### ABSTRACTION IN THE FINE ARTS

Some arts, however, go farther in the direction of conventionalization; they reject all of the concrete elements of life itself and translate the thought or feeling into a language of abstractions—of pure form. Music, the most popular and universal of all the arts, is one of these. It expresses moods or feelings in terms of musical tones and rhythms, abstract things that have no specific or rational meaning in themselves but gain their effects directly through their power to stir up emotions. We accept and enjoy this convention because our senses tell us that it is a beautiful one, because it enables us to assume an æsthetic attitude; and the more accustomed we become to such abstraction the more we resent any attempt to reralationalize music by injecting elements of the concrete. So-called "descriptive music" is quite generally displeasing to persons of cultivated taste, except perhaps when it is frankly humorous, or associated with child's play, as in the case of the *Children's Symphony* of Haydn.

<sup>1</sup> It is true that the Greeks colored their statues—probably more for decoration than for realism.

Of late years there has been a marked tendency in some quarters toward a greater degree of abstraction in all the fine arts. Cubism, futurism, and surrealism in painting, mysticism in poetry, and expressionism in the theatre are familiar examples of this—though in all these, as in other radical reforms, the principles involved have been much beclouded by opportunists seeking easy notoriety and by psycho-neurotics seeking to satisfy their craving for the abnormal. An exhaustive discussion of abstraction in art would be out of place in this book; but the existence of the tendency cannot be ignored by anyone who would understand modern stage directing. A play like Saroyan's *Jim Dandy* or Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth* calls for a very different style of directing from that appropriate to a realistic comedy of family life. There is a great deal to be said for the enrichment of our opportunities to enjoy beauty in its more abstract forms; yet one can have little sympathy with those extremists who would abolish all art not highly abstract. It is true that many of our finest æsthetic feelings spring from such arts as music and the dance, but there is no need on that account to abolish representational painting, or the realistic novel, or the drama. These things give pleasure too. As new and beautiful abstractions are developed in the theatre, through which real messages of the spirit can be artistically conveyed, let us accept them by all means. But let us also cherish the more traditional art of the drama—an art that is in some respects more concrete than any other because it retains actual life, speech, and movement, as well as color and form; but that is second only to music in the permanency and universality of its appeal.

#### THE NATURE OF THE SENSE OF BEAUTY

The ancients thought of beauty almost exclusively in connection with the fine arts, making very little mention of the beauties of nature as such. Yet with apparent inconsistency many of them emphasized the element of imitation in the fine arts, alleging that beauty lay in the subject matter imitated, and that the measure of the artist's achievement was his ability to reproduce beautiful subject matter accurately. Some even went so far as to maintain that there could be no beauty, no æsthetic pleasure, in the artistic representation of what was not in itself beautiful.

Plato and Aristotle were among the first to modify this idea, Aristotle recognizing that under some conditions the representation of actual ugliness

ness might give æsthetic pleasure. Neither, however, was fully able to explain the phenomenon. Aristotle seemed to think that admiration of the skill with which the imitation was accomplished was the source of the pleasure, a theory that has found much support in modern times among certain schools of realists. He also developed the well-known "theory of catharsis," the theory of beauty in tragedy based upon the idea of a cleansing or purging of the spirit of the observer. Plato tried to explain beauty by emphasizing the pleasure to be drawn from unity in variety. This became, and still is, one of the leading thoughts in æsthetic philosophy, but it explains the method of the fine arts rather than the æsthetic purpose. The Greeks thought the pleasure of unity a sensuous one, and their insistence upon the idea is partly responsible not only for the widespread exaltation of the unities in later times, especially in France, but also for the common notion that all art is sensuous.

Modern writers in general have ridiculed the idea that imitation or representation is the key to beauty. They have pointed out that if this were so there would be no excuse for art at all, since the beautiful object in nature would always be more beautiful than any possible imitation of it; whereas it is well known that we often take more pleasure in the representation than in the reality. They have pointed out also, following Aristotle, that we often take the very greatest pleasure in the representation of the tragic—of that which, in the reality, would give us the greatest pain. In other words they have denied that æsthetic pleasure in the fine arts is based *either* upon the intrinsic beauty of the object imitated or upon the fidelity of the imitation.

But that is about all they agree upon. When it comes to offering a substitute explanation they differ widely. One says that beauty lies in the symbolism of the imitation; another that it lies in the revelation of the artist's own soul in his interpretation of what he sees; another that it lies in the extent to which the creative impulse is exercised by the observer through his imagination. Some confuse their æsthetic with their ethical theories and assert that beauty is truth and truth beauty, or that beauty is approach to goodness or perfection; others adopt a religious point of view and say that beauty lies in the approach to God. But possibly the largest number, following the Greek idea, believe that the sense of beauty rests on a more or less sensuous appreciation of form.

## IS BEAUTY SENSUOUS?

The latter view finds considerable support in the teachings of modern psychology, and appeals especially to those who have started with a philosophical concept and are seeking to justify it on psychological grounds. But it raises a difficulty: If appreciation of beauty is purely a matter of the effect of form on our senses, what about the thought content of so many fine arts—literature and the drama, for instance? Is that merely incidental and of no consequence? Or if we find pleasure in thought, must we regard that pleasure as non-æsthetic?

There are some who do not hesitate to go so far. Ethel Puffer,<sup>2</sup> for instance, seems to take such a position with respect to the fine arts in general, freely admitting the value of intellectual pleasure but denying that it is æsthetic. Gordon Craig certainly takes it with respect to the theatre, demanding such unity of sensuous appeal as the Greeks themselves hardly dreamed of, and lamenting bitterly the intellectual distractions that are always getting in the way.

To complain that this theory would exclude from æsthetic consideration such plays as those of Shaw or Galsworthy would be to invite the criticism that Galsworthy is a moralist anyhow, and Shaw a propagandist. Let us consider, then, not Shaw or Galsworthy, but Shakespeare. Although there is some sensuous appeal in the poetry of Shakespeare, it is not so much beauty of form or sound as beauty of thought that has made him the world's greatest poet; and it is not so much the appeal to the senses through sound and spectacle as the appeal to the understanding through revelation of human character and motive that has made him the world's greatest dramatist. Yet surely the pleasure he gives us is æsthetic in the highest sense. If not, then æsthetic pleasure is too narrow and trivial to bother about, and is not the sole or principal aim of the fine arts—as, indeed, many critics are now asserting, especially the devotees of propagandist or “socially significant” art. Some of us prefer to keep the term and make the interpretation broad enough to cover the kinds of pleasure we really do take in the fine arts.

What then is æsthetic pleasure in the broad sense? To formulate any sort of helpful answer we must take into consideration certain elements which play no direct part in ancient philosophy. A few modern writers,

<sup>2</sup> *The Psychology of Beauty*.

combining philosophical thought with scientific investigation, have clarified the problem considerably, and have given us some principles of æsthetic appreciation that are not only of great interest, but of great practical value to the stage director. The most notable contribution of this sort in English was made in 1920 by Herbert Sidney Langfeld in his book *The Æsthetic Attitude*, a book which every stage director should read.

#### THE PSYCHOLOGY OF APPRECIATION

It is quite usual for artists and æsthetes to scoff at psychology—except, perhaps, abnormal psychology—and to insist that art is on a higher plane than science and altogether independent of it. To some extent one must share this view, for too much science breeds self-consciousness and self-consciousness destroys ease and naturalness in art. But there is no profit in ignoring facts, and there are some facts about human behavior which so vitally affect our concept of beauty and our reaction to it that the creative artist cannot escape them. He may ignore them, or he may conform with them unconsciously; he may succeed in his art through accident or inspiration. But play production, being a group art, is of necessity a more conscious art than some others. The director's task, being largely that of criticizing and harmonizing the work of others, must be more consciously performed than those of some other artists, and he must thoroughly understand what he is doing.

Psychology is still, of course, an experimental science, and psychologists differ widely in their fundamental explanations of human behavior. Most of them, however, concede the importance of what is called motor response in relation to our emotional sensibilities, including our reaction to beauty. Motor response may be explained very simply in terms made familiar through elementary physiology as taught in the schools. Everybody knows that the human organism is controlled through a nervous system, of which the brain itself is the apex, and that the main portion of the system consists of two sets of nerves: sensory nerves, which report the experiences of the sense organs, and motor nerves, which control the movements of the muscles. Nearly everybody is familiar with what is commonly called "reflex action," whereby certain sense impressions are received and corresponding motor impulses discharged without conscious

realization.<sup>8</sup> Some schoolbooks assert that this function is carried on by the spinal cord, and some appear to treat it as exceptional. In point of fact it is quite normal; indeed it takes care of most of the impressions we receive. Only a few of the most striking impressions ever reach the brain—or at any rate the consciousness. In walking through a mile of familiar streets one may step up and down a score of curbs, turn corners, and avoid obstructions, without ever being conscious of the sense impressions that have made him do these things, or of the motor activities involved in them. Only when an impression is unusual, contrasting, or vivid, does enough of it reach the brain to engage attention; and perhaps even then a part of it finds its way into motor response automatically and in advance of the resulting thought process.

There is nothing new in the mere observation of motor response, or in the fact that most of our responses are unconscious. Long before the nervous system itself was discovered, men had observed that certain perceptions caused certain muscular reactions; and even the ancients knew that some of these reactions had something to do with the appreciation of beauty. What is comparatively new is the scientific recognition of a general law—simple, but universal—governing the relation of motor response to sense impression.

#### THE LAW OF MOTOR RESPONSE

The law is this: For every stimulus impressed upon the human organism there is a direct motor response, the nature of which depends upon two factors, (1) the nature of the stimulus, and (2) the nature of the past experience of the organism.

By a stimulus is meant primarily an impression received through one of the senses and conveyed to the brain, or toward the brain, by the sensory nerves; but a remembered or imagined stimulus is also capable of inducing a motor response.

By a motor response is meant an impulse to activity, carried to the muscles of the body through the motor nerves. When the impulse is strong enough and is not inhibited or suppressed in any way it results in

<sup>8</sup> Some modern psychologists define a reflex as an inherited response, but as the whole question of heredity is still in dispute the definition is of no use to us. I am using the term in the popular meaning of *unconscious* response, though, to be sure, no one has yet successfully defined consciousness.

a clearly defined muscular action, and we are all familiar enough with such manifestations. But many of our motor impulses are too feeble to result in any outwardly visible action, and many more are inhibited either consciously or unconsciously by reason of the restraints imposed upon us by civilization and education. That is why the operation of the law so often escapes notice, and why we get into the habit of supposing that perceptions sometimes result merely in thought or feeling, and not in action. What really happens is that every time we see, hear, touch, taste, or smell something we experience almost instantly a corresponding motor response, even though it be limited to a mere "action pattern" or "motor set," imperceptible to the eye. The existence of such a concealed response, when no outward response is discernible, can be proved in the laboratory through the use of delicate instruments which record changes in blood pressure, muscle tensions, and the chemical reactions in the body. It has been claimed that a witness may be detected in a lie by this method; that no matter how skillful he may be in concealing his inner reactions from an ordinary observer he is helpless to prevent the occurrence of automatic responses easily recorded by the so-called "lie detector."

#### MOTOR ATTITUDES IN ÆSTHETIC APPRECIATION

The observation of a work of art takes place through the senses, particularly those of sight and hearing. According to the law, there must be certain motor responses induced by such observation, and it seems reasonable to suppose that the nature of these responses may have something to do with whether or not we derive pleasure from the observation. As a matter of fact it can be shown that our æsthetic enjoyment is chiefly dependent upon our motor attitudes—is actually felt in terms of those attitudes.

This is a strong statement, and at first glance may seem inconsistent with my previous contention that there is an intellectual as well as a sensuous element in beauty. But it must be remembered that the motor attitudes are dependent upon two factors: the observer's previous preparation and the stimulus itself. It is in the observer's previous preparation that the intellectual element is to be found. Into that preparation enter not only all the sights and sounds that have ever fallen upon his senses, but also all the thoughts and emotions that have resulted from them,

either directly or indirectly. Sense stimuli are in themselves meaningless; it is only as they take on meaning in terms of the individual's experience that they become significant. A new-born infant, though his senses function, fails to notice even very obvious sights and sounds. It is not until he has grown familiar with certain impressions and begun to make associations and draw inferences that he begins to show appreciative response. If beauty were a matter of pure form, without meaning, and appreciation nothing but an automatic effect of form on sense, the youngest infant not blind or deaf would have as keen an appreciation of the fine arts as the most experienced connoisseur. Perhaps he has, but the evidence does not seem to show it. It seems to show rather that the highest æsthetic appreciation must be learned through experience; or in other words that one's power to assume a pleasurable motor attitude toward the finest works of art must be acquired through familiarity with the stimuli involved, and understanding of their significance in relation to the whole experience of life.

The artist's problem, then, is largely the problem of producing the right motor attitudes in his audience. To do so he must take into consideration both of the governing factors—the nature of the stimuli, and the previous experience of his audience. Since the stimuli with which he is to make his appeal are themselves intelligible to his audience only in terms of previous experience, the two factors cannot be separated, but must be studied together.

For the stage director such a study is especially important, because he cannot escape the responsibility of appealing to his audience as a whole, regardless of their individual differences. A painter or a poet can express himself on canvas or paper with the feeling that the public can take his work or leave it; he expects appreciation from some and not from others, and he knows that the unappreciative ones will not interfere with the others. But the stage director cannot afford to neglect any of his audience, for if he fails to reach some of them their indifference or hostility will soon affect the rest. The painter may concern himself with expression, leaving the matter of *impression* to accident; the stage director must think in terms of *impression*. To do so he must understand this matter of response as well as it can be understood.

An exhaustive study of the psychology of response would be impossible



here. There are, however, two major principles on the æsthetic side of the study which are of such direct importance to the stage director as to call for careful consideration. The first of these is the principle of "empathy" or imitative response as an element of appreciation, and the second is the principle of artistic detachment or "æsthetic distance."



## *The Principle of Empathy*

A GREAT many of our motor responses are in some way imitative. Of that we can be sure, though the exact part played by imitation in our behavior, and especially in our learning processes, is another subject of dispute among the psychologists. Children certainly employ imitation in learning, if only to strengthen impressions already received, and most of their play is imitative. If older people seem less imitative than children it is partly because their behavior is more complex and therefore less easily analyzed, and partly because they have learned to suppress many of their motor responses as a matter of good manners. But the impulses are there, and those which are not outwardly visible are often of great importance in relation to artistic appreciation.

If a man with a very peculiar walk passes a group of children at play they are very likely to fall in behind and follow him, imitating his walk and exaggerating it. Perhaps this impulse is not so very far from the basic impulse of acting. But we do not always recognize the fact that older people feel the impulse just as strongly as children, and that they suppress it only because civilization has taught them to do so. They may be unconscious of the impulse, but that is because the lesson of inhibition has been so well learned that it operates instantly, and suppresses the impulse before it gets started.

In contemplating an object of interest we commonly assume an imitative attitude toward it, feeling out the lines of the object in our own bodies. Thus when we behold the ocean or the mountains we involuntarily throw back our shoulders and expand our lungs, seeming to feel in ourselves the vastness and grandeur of the scene. When we watch a ballet dancer in motion we follow vicariously her every movement, feeling the grace and lightness as if it were our own. When we listen to music we instinctively seek out the rhythm and follow it with bodily pulsations of some sort, even beating time with feet or hands. And when

we see a human being in a perilous or painful situation—a steeplejack in danger of falling from a high building, for instance—we experience much of the sensation of pain or danger in ourselves. When the stimuli are strong and the restraints weak we show these imitative responses in visible action; more often we feel and conceal them; and more often still we experience them only as motor sets, or patterns, and are not even conscious of their nature.

The importance of these imitative motor responses in relation to the sense of beauty has been pointed out by numerous writers,<sup>1</sup> but the most helpful discussion from the standpoint of stage direction is to be found in Langfeld's book, *The Æsthetic Attitude*. Following Titchener, he calls such responses "empathic," and the term "empathy" is now pretty generally accepted in this country by students of the arts and especially by stage directors.

Not all empathic response—not even all pleasant empathic response—is æsthetic; but it is probable that all æsthetic pleasure is empathic. Obviously we can experience pleasant empathy only in what is itself pleasant; the empathic response to pain cannot be pleasant, since it consists in feeling the pain in our own attitude. This suggests an important limitation of the fine arts which some extreme realists disregard. However, a painful empathy with respect to a part of something may not be inconsistent with a keen enjoyment of the whole—as, for instance, when dissonances are properly employed in music, or when sorrow plays a part in drama. In such cases the unpleasant empathies may serve to season the pleasant ones by contrast—as red pepper and garlic season the soup—provided, of course, that the pleasant empathies dominate; and this has led some philosophers to believe that the highest form of æsthetic enjoyment lies in a reconciliation or fusion of varied empathies. One version of the theory<sup>2</sup> is that complete æsthetic pleasure is to be found only in perfect repose, and that such repose is to be found only in a perfect balance of empathic responses, a balance equivalent to neutralization. This theory has the advantage of seeming to explain the well-known principles of balance and proportion in design, and is not inconsistent with the rules of harmony in music and the principle of poetic justice in literature. Moreover, it seems to fit in perfectly with another principle of ex-

<sup>1</sup> Lipps, Groos, Puffer, Bosanquet, Santayana, and others. The idea is well known among æsthetic philosophers as the "*Einführungstheorie*" of Lipps.

<sup>2</sup> See Puffer, *The Psychology of Beauty*.

treme importance, the principle of æsthetic distance—of which more later.

### EMPATHY IN THE THEATRE

Empathic responses play an equally vital part in all of the fine arts, but in some arts they are obscure and difficult to study. Just how, for example, does one empathize in a Gothic cathedral? Unquestionably there is an imitative impulse of some sort, possibly a stretching upward in imitation of the vertical lines, but there can be no exact imitation because living muscles cannot take the form of a stone building. The very impossibility of exact imitation limits the response to a motor pattern, even if there are no inhibiting influences. Similarly, in contemplating a landscape or a piece of furniture or any inanimate object of beauty, one can but feel the lines, in a rough sort of way; he cannot counterfeit the object as a whole.

But the art of the theatre is in terms of human beings—live ones, moving and speaking and showing emotions; and in these one can empathize more vividly and completely than in any other conceivable medium. Herein, I believe, lies the deep and universal appeal of the theatre: deep, because we can go so much farther in our empathic responses; universal, because all kinds of people can respond to it. To empathize properly in an etching, a beautiful building, or a symphonic poem, one must have had some artistic experience, some training, some cultivation; but anybody can feel an imitative response to a human being and anybody can take pleasure in it.

Nearly everybody likes to share the experiences of other human beings. That is the gregarious nature of man. Also, nearly everybody nurses certain suppressed longings for human experiences that he has not himself had, and never expects to have, and perhaps in his better judgment does not really wish to have. In the theatre he is enabled to satisfy these longings vicariously, without entangling himself in the obligations and embarrassments that may be incidental to the real experience—just as the spectator at a football game feels in his own muscle tensions the thrill of heroic endeavor without actually suffering the hard knocks. This is a large part of the appeal of sport; it is also a large part of the appeal of fiction, and the theatre is the most vivid form of fiction.

This being so, the stage director can ill afford to ignore or neglect the

principle of empathy, and its specific application to the art of the theatre. Bearing in mind the two factors that govern every response—the nature of the stimulus and the nature of the observer's previous preparation—he must ask himself what imitative responses each character, each scene, each piece of action will evoke, and whether they will be pleasant. There are other considerations, of course, but if he can cultivate the ability to foresee empathic effects he will find that many of the most serious problems of play production become easier of solution.

#### EMPATHY IN CASTING

Many a play has been spoiled by errors in casting, quite apart from the abilities of the actors as actors. The leading lady may be a beautiful and capable actress, yet fail to win the kind of sympathetic interest that is essential to the play. The critics will say that she lacks personality or that her personality is not suited to the part. But "personality" is a vague word. It is more accurate to say that she lacks the power of inducing the proper empathic responses in the audience.

Generally speaking, the women in the audience empathize most strongly in the heroine, while the men empathize most strongly in the hero. Nothing could be more wholehearted than the response the women give to an actress who can make them feel the experiences of the heroine imaginatively in their own bodies. This is the secret of Ethel Barrymore's power to attract and move large audiences of women. "When Ethel Barrymore speaks," a woman once said to me, "all the heart throbs I have ever felt come back to me." Her deep chest tones, her heaving bosom, and her eloquent little gestures seem to grip the women and make them one with the character—no matter how bad the play. I recall seeing the men in the audience convulsed with laughter some years ago at the absurdities of her death scene in a play called *Déclassée*, by Zoë Akins. She was supposed to have been struck by a car off stage. In defiance of all first-aid rules she was hustled in, dumped on a sofa at stage center, and allowed to die sitting bolt upright, with people standing around staring at her and doing nothing to bind up her wounds (if any). No man could take such a scene seriously, yet the women wept and suffered with an æsthetic exaltation that Bernhardt at her best could hardly have given them. On the other hand the reader will no doubt recall many actresses—beautiful, accomplished, and per-

haps pleasing to the men—who have seemed always to leave the women in the audience cold and unresponsive.

Similarly there are actors who antagonize the men; actors who seem capable enough and look their parts, who are popular, perhaps, with the women, but who produce only savage disgust in the men. The photo-drama is particularly afflicted with such actors. There is the actor with deep dark eyes and curly hair and the build of a Greek god; the women say: "How handsome he is! What soulful eyes! How well his sport flannels fit him!" But the men are very likely saying: "Good Lord! What a ladylike voice! and look how he holds a tennis racket! If I talked and acted that way I'd feel like a fool or a sissy." The trouble is, they *are* feeling it—empathically—and the sensation is painful.

In choosing a cast, therefore, the director should consider two things: the direct effect of each player upon those who are to empathize most strongly in the character he represents, and the indirect effect upon those who are to empathize in the opposite character. The actress who is to play a sympathetic part must be able to appeal to the women by making them feel the experiences of the character in their own bodies, and she must be able to fit in properly with the empathic responses which the men are giving to the male characters. In other words, if she is to play the heroine she must be capable of making every woman feel like the heroine herself, and of making every man in the audience fall in love with her vicariously. Every man must feel that it would be no hardship to embrace her, else when the hero does so there will be a revulsion of feeling.

On the other hand, if the player is to do an unsympathetic part it is just as necessary that he should not induce too warm an empathic response. In a light, witty farce by Clare Kummer called *Many Happy Returns*, sweet-faced Mary Astor was cast in the part of an adventuress who philanders with the hero's son because she has always loved the father. She played it so sincerely and sympathetically that the effect was very moving—and ruined the evening by killing the farce. It was not her fault; it was a plain case of miscasting through failure to foresee empathic response.

The Cheryl Crawford version of *The Tempest*, as directed by Margaret Webster, was a thrilling and beautiful production; but it was partly spoiled for me by the miscasting of Vera Zorina as Ariel. She was the personification of grace and agility, played with sincerity and poetic feel-

ing, and read her lines very well indeed; but she was intensely real, alive, and feminine—not at all the insubstantial, sexless sprite of Shakespeare's fancy. Again it was not the player's fault; it was simply that Ariel should be played by a person of totally different empathic effect—preferably a boy.

The physical characteristics of actors are important empathically, and must be considered in casting—beauty, grace, stature, voice, and the rest. But the imagination is even more important, for it is the actor with a lively and flexible imagination who is most apt to create the proper empathic effects. Of the physical characteristics, voice seems most closely associated with imagination, at least when adequately controlled. The late Mrs. Fiske always insisted upon voice as the most important concern of the actor—a vehicle of the imagination, but to be considered before it because more susceptible to training and more generally in need of it. It is precisely because of its great empathic power that voice is so significant; and it is not only a vehicle of the imagination but to some extent an index of it. The director choosing a cast must look both for imagination and for the physical means of inducing empathic response, and the voice will tell him much about both.

#### NATURALISM AND EMPATHY

Despite the attacks of the anti-realists, most actors strive, by countless little tricks of stage business or pantomime, to create an impression of naturalness. It is largely through empathy that they succeed. When Uncle Josh, in *The Old Homestead*, washes his face in a basin of soapy water and then goes groping blindly for a towel he induces an instantaneous response in those of us who have done likewise. When the "terrible-tempered Mr. Bang" of the Fontaine Fox cartoons explodes at some familiar annoyance which the rest of us resent but endure, we take a savage empathic satisfaction in his exploits. When Leonard, in *The Dover Road*, develops a cold in the head we laugh, but we laugh with a lively sense of the reality of that discomfort. Whenever a little touch of naturalness heightens the illusion it is the empathic response that is at work; we are feeling the reality of the character because he is doing things that, in terms of our past experience, we can easily imagine ourselves as doing.

The function of stage business in general is largely empathic. There

are those, of course, who would do away with stage business, especially in poetic drama, on the ground that it is cheapening and that great beauty of emotion can best be revealed through the play of voice and imagination in speech. Perhaps it can, if the artist is equal to the task—pure reading being undoubtedly a higher and more difficult art than acting. But we are considering acting, and not reading. Too much stage business is, of course, distracting, even in the most realistic drama, and stage business for its own sake is never justifiable. But as a means of creating the proper empathies, stage business not only is justifiable but is sometimes more effective than the voice itself, for the reason that it is less difficult to manage. The voice is subtle, even treacherous, and but few actors have it under perfect control, while stage business can be invented by the director and performed by the actor with a certain assurance of accuracy and stability.

The dramatist sometimes feels this, and so plans to have important or significant scenes played in pantomime; and the director can often point up or intensify scenes in this way. Many of Bernhardt's most telling scenes were silent ones, turning perhaps upon a single expressive gesture, rightly chosen to begin with, and then played with absolute precision at every performance—this despite her possession of a truly great voice.

There are times when silent action is empathically more eloquent than voice. To say this is not to deny the power of voice or to discourage its use when well controlled; but if in a silent scene there is no vibrant sympathetic voice to stir the proper emotions, at least there is no poorly controlled, disillusioning voice to interfere with them and create unpleasant empathies; and if the director has planned the movements and business effectively and the actor has imagination, the empathic response will be strong. It is an unfortunate fact that not one actress in ten can weep vocally and be convincing, and that not one in twenty can laugh convincingly. Yet a false cry or a false laugh is empathically one of the most unpleasant experiences anybody can have in the theatre. Very few directors seem to realize this, or if they do they are at a loss how to correct the trouble. Sometimes it cannot be corrected at all so far as the voice is concerned, but pantomime can often be effectively substituted. An actress whose audible cry would make one's blood run cold can achieve a very satisfactory suggestion of grief by simply turning away from the audience, covering her face, and heaving her shoulder as if she were sobbing.



In general, if the dramatist has done his work well the big scene of a play will have been prepared for, and the empathies of the audience will carry it with but the simplest suggestions from the actors.

It has often been remarked that some actors act only with their voices, or with their faces and hands, while others act with their whole bodies. As a general rule the latter are immeasurably more effective, because they evoke more empathic response. In the Theatre Guild production of *Jacobowsky and the Colonel*, both Louis Calhern and Oscar Karlweis, in the leading roles, gave remarkable demonstrations of this; a deaf person could have watched them and grasped their characters completely from their postures and movements. Helen Hayes, in *Victoria Regina*, told us more about certain moods of the Queen by the way she walked than by her words. As Marie in *Liliom*, years ago, Hortense Alden achieved an exit that was a masterpiece; ordered away by the bossy Mrs. Muskat, she had to go clear across the stage with never a word to say (thus violating the ordinary rules of stage procedure), but she did it with such an impudent expression and such a baffling mixture of shamle and skip that she left the audience literally tingling with her mood. No one who saw the New York production of *I Remember Mama* will forget the limping but dynamic Oscar Homolka, who was Uncle Chris from top to toe.

There are possibly more actresses than actors who can "act all over." Conspicuous examples from the past and present would include, in addition to those already mentioned, Sarah Bernhardt, Ada Rehan, May Robson, Annie Russell, Ruth Chatterton, Laurette Taylor, Maria Ouspenskaya, Pauline Lord, Eugenie Leontovich, June Walker, Josephine Hull, Adrienne Gessner, Julie Haydon, Katharine Cornell, and Dorothy Stickney. Among the male actors Otis Skinner, George M. Cohan, Dudley Digges, Ivan Simpson, and Howard Lindsay might be cited for the same quality. The actress has perhaps more need of this faculty than the actor, women being commonly less reserved and more expressive in movement than men. But there are many stage people of both sexes who fall short of the ideal in coordination of bodily movement, failing to stir up adequate empathic response because they do not seem to be feeling things down to their toes; and there are some who, failing to use their extremities expressively, use them distractingly, making all sorts of meaningless and irrelevant movements that stir up no empathies except those of uncertainty and self-consciousness. It should

be the aim of every actor to make his whole body responsive to his imagination, and it should be the director's aim to choose actors and actresses who have succeeded in doing so.

### THE EMPATHY OF THRILLS

With an understanding of empathic response we are in a position to appreciate the tremendous effect of thrilling situations in the theatre.

The drama is built out of contrasts and conflicts, out of obstacles and dangers and their overcoming. The greater the danger or obstacle, the greater the empathic satisfaction in seeing it overcome. It is the director's business, therefore, to see that the dangers are so presented that the audience will feel them keenly in their own imaginative experiences.

A few years ago we had a deluge of thrilling mystery plays, and the phenomenal popularity of many of these was largely due to the skill with which empathic effects were handled. Despite the impact of mass murder in two wars, the vogue of such plays has not completely died down; new ones appear from time to time, and old ones are revived in stock and community theatres—especially *Seven Keys to Baldpate* and *The Bat*. Mysterious banging of doors and rattling of chains, hairy arms reaching in through windows or out through panels in the walls, lights going out suddenly, trap doors opening in the floor, threats of vivisection or sudden death—by such means are audiences made to feel danger through identifying themselves with the imperiled character. In *The Ghost Breaker*, one of the earliest plays of this type, there was a scene in which the hero, after a fruitless search for the disturbers in a haunted house, stood near a huge suit of armor. Suddenly the latter came to life and, raising a prodigious sword, prepared to bring it down on the hero's unsuspecting head. Audience after audience screamed in horror at the scene; they felt that sword descending on their own heads.

More recent mystery plays abound in similarly terrifying empathies. Examples might include the sliding panel in *Double Door*; the body falling out of the closet into Mr. North's arms in *Mr. and Mrs. North*; the poisoned wine in *Arsenic and Old Lace* (borrowed, of course, from an earlier thriller named *Hamlet*); also, in a lighter vein, the business of enticing Lorraine Sheldon into the mummy case and slamming it shut in *The Man Who Came to Dinner*.

It is remarkable what nonsense audiences will accept if the empathy is

only made strong enough. Most of the popular thrillers make no pretense of being anything but claptrap, but they often play to packed houses, and audiences squeal with expectancy when the lights go out, even before the rise of the curtain. However, equally thrilling effects can be achieved in drama of a higher type and greater sincerity; in a good production of *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*, for example, the empathies are as powerful as in *The Bat*, though without the element of spoofing that leads to hysterical giggles.

In the photoplay abundant use is made of the empathic thrill, particularly in comedy; in fact, the film comedy is largely based upon it, with wild rides on motorcycles, trains, or automobiles, with runaway baby carriages, narrowly avoided collisions, and daredevil stunts of all kinds. A favorite situation is one in which the comic character is seen slipping and falling on a narrow ledge ten stories above the street; when the window molding to which he is clinging suddenly gives way one's stomach seems literally to turn over. It is almost too harrowing as a theatrical experience, but audiences seem to like such things. The photoplay director has a peculiar opportunity to intensify the empathic sensations by first showing you the character in a precarious position, and then moving the camera to that position and showing you the danger just exactly as the character sees it. This is the strongest possible aid to complete empathy—but perhaps it is a blessing that stage directors cannot do likewise.

Another favorite situation in comedy is that of embarrassment. Nearly everybody has imagined—or dreamed—how it would feel to be caught out in public inadequately clothed, or to be called upon for a speech when unprepared, or to forget one's lines in a play; and when a character in a story or play gets into a similar situation one feels his experiences with vivid empathy. The predicament of the young man in *To The Ladies* who finds his memorized speech preempted by another speaker strikes a response in almost everyone; and that of the man who innocently loses his trousers is so universally horrifying that it has been worked to death, especially in the motion pictures.

#### EMPATHY IN POETIC JUSTICE

One of the most intense empathic effects in the theatre, and one of the most truly dramatic, is that which one feels in the satisfaction of

poetic justice. The concept of poetic justice may be an intellectual one, depending upon a nice balance of æsthetic and ethical ideals; but the actual sensation in seeing the concept realized is as physical as that of scratching a mosquito bite, or—better—of killing the mosquito.

When, to take a very simple and obvious case, the villain in a melodrama takes mean advantage of a defenseless female and for a time goes unpunished, there is gradually built up in the audience an intense itch to see that villain get what is coming to him. That itch must be satisfied, or the play is no play. When it is satisfied—when in the last scene the hero, his patience exhausted, rises in just wrath and smites the villain—the empathic ecstasy is so keen that only a child with his freedom from inhibitions can do justice to it. Pick out a melodramatic photoplay—one with a cowboy or soldier hero, if possible—and go to the matinee when the house is full of children. See how quickly and instinctively they identify themselves with the hero, how they hiss and hate the villain, how they groan each time he escapes, how they fall into dismayed silence as he captures the heroine; and then how they burst into frantic cheering as the hero rides to the rescue, and scream with delight as poetic justice is finally achieved. Here is empathy in its simplest but most vigorous form. One may laugh at it for its childish crudity, but no one is likely to make a good stage director who does not realize that the most cultivated artistic appreciation is a development and refinement of the same thing.

The desire to see the villain vanquished can hardly be separated from the equally cogent desire to see the hero win out. The latter desire is particularly strong when the hero is not merely the protagonist but a heroic or admirable character as well. Hero worship is a powerful element in drama as it is in life, and we all recognize its claim upon us; but we do not always realize that it is largely empathic.

When Sherlock Holmes, in the Conan Doyle stories, or in one of the many stage, film, or radio plays based on them, walks calmly into danger with a quiet reassuring mastery of the situation, we enjoy feeling that we are like that ourselves. We are not, of course—most of us, at any rate—but the very fact that he makes us feel a bravery and an efficiency greater than our own accounts for the pleasure he gives us. The small boy perhaps prefers a big, rough, two-fisted, quick-shooting, hard-riding hero who can make him feel like a stronger and braver animal. The small girl used to prefer Pollyanna; perhaps nowadays she prefers a film

heroine who qualifies as a test pilot or a lady Marine. It is the older man with a somewhat studious turn of mind, believing in the mastery of intellect over brute strength, who empathizes best in Sherlock Holmes; and it is the calmness and the masterful intelligence even more than the bravery of the great detective that give such a man his greatest thrill.

There was a remarkably satisfying effect of poetic justice in a silent photoplay produced many years ago called *One Glorious Day*—one of the best comedy films ever turned out, and one that is still revived occasionally in some of the studio art theatres which make a specialty of reviving old films. The story is that of a particularly vigorous and bellicose spirit named Ek, who, escaping from the land of unborn souls, visits the earth ahead of time. Seeking a ready-made body to inhabit, he finds that of a certain professor of psychology; it is not just what he is looking for, but it is the only one he can find unoccupied, the professor being just then engaged in a psychic demonstration which requires the presence of his disengaged spirit at a seance some distance away. Ek occupies the body and spends "one glorious day" on earth. The point is that the professor (delightfully played by the late Will Rogers) is an honest, inoffensive soul, much imposed upon by his neighbors, including a set of grafting politicians who are making him their innocent tool. We are just itching to see the scoundrels get what they deserve—but with little hope because of the professor's mildness and innocence—when Ek takes possession of the body. The transformation is electrifying; the professor (with the soul of Ek) tears into his enemies like the god of wrath. We have been wanting action, and we get it, with a rapidity and thoroughness that make us whoop for joy.

#### BEAUTY IN THE THEATRE

The empathies of the theatre are varied in the extreme, because the art of the theatre is complex. Many of them are not pleasurable or suggestive of beauty in themselves; the beauty in such cases lies in the effect of the whole, in the harmony and balance of empathies as the conclusion of the drama is reached. But normally it is the pleasant empathic effects which we expect in the theatre, and which give us our sensation of beauty. There is room in the theatre for all the beauties of pure form that belong to painting, sculpture, music, literature, and the dance. The director must study and apply all these. In addition there are empathic effects

of great beauty belonging to the theatre in its own right—like the thrill of Bernhardt's acting voice, the rhythm of the ant scene in *The World We Live In*, the crescendo of light and music at the end of Act One of *The Miracle*, the sudden curtain tableau in *The Inspector-General*, the impact of the climax scene in *The Yellow Jacket*, or the repressed beauty of the love scene, with "boogie-woogie" accompaniment, in Saroyan's *Jim Dandy*. The best thing about the present age of experiment in the theatre is that through it we are finding more and larger opportunities for such effects—opportunities to enjoy beauty in the means as well as the end of play production. The danger is only that the means may be allowed to eclipse the end; that in our enjoyment of form we may forget all about purpose.

#### DETRIMENTAL EMPATHY

Not all empathic responses are helpful to the æsthetic purpose of a play. At the same time that the director is striving to build up the pleasing ones he must be on his guard against unnecessarily displeasing ones, that hinder, or distract, or annoy.

When Romeo climbs a rickety latticework in the balcony scene, threatening to pull Juliet and the balcony down on top of him, there is a strong empathic effect, but it is unpleasant, distracting, and ruinous to the play. A few modern producers are to be thanked for sparing their audiences that customary agony. Every piece of flimsy scenery or rickety stage furniture is a possible source of detrimental empathy, especially if an actor must risk his weight on it in some way.

When Laertes jumps into Ophelia's open grave—sometimes followed by Hamlet—the effect is nearly always bad. It is traditional for him to do so, and of course one can explain away the difficulty by supposing that there is room enough in the grave for him to stand beside her; but it always looks as if he had jumped right on her stomach! The more one empathizes in him the more revolting the sensation. Yet actors and directors go right on perpetuating that unpleasant bit of business.

In the Margaret Webster production of *The Tempest* a unit set on a turntable was in several instances made to rotate in view of the audience, but so suddenly that Ariel—even in the person of the agile Zorina—teetered dangerously on her pinnacle of rock while the audience gasped with apprehension.

A situation that often occurs, especially in stock or amateur production, is that of the hero who is called upon to carry another character on or off stage and is hardly equal to the task. So great is the distracting empathy that some gallery wit is sure to shout "Oof!" and put the house in an uproar. The director should try to choose his cast with foresight in such matters, and to train his actors to simulate ease even when they do not feel it. There is a knack about carrying people, and even a strong actor will seem to labor heavily in carrying a lightly built girl unless the scene has been carefully rehearsed; almost as much depends upon the skill of the person carried as upon that of the carrier.

Unpleasant and detrimental empathies may be stirred up by badly placed furniture, unnecessary business, clumsy movements, ill-fitting costumes, excessive make-up, and a thousand and one little things that escape the notice of many directors. If Margaret Webster knew how to avoid unpleasant empathies as well as she knows how to create dramatic ones her productions would be much more uniformly satisfying than they are. If the Hollywood directors could realize how many detrimental empathies are evoked by the "close-up" in the photoplay—especially when excessive make-up is employed—they would revise their methods considerably. It is in avoiding detrimental empathies that the director's skill is put to the severest test. The dramatist may foresee and suggest the positive empathic effects that are needed in order to carry the meaning of the play; but he cannot foresee the distracting influences that may arise in the course of rehearsals. Neither can the director foresee them; he must be extremely alert during rehearsals in order to check them as they arise.

Examples of empathy, good and bad, could be multiplied indefinitely, but perhaps I have already given more than enough to illustrate the principle. It is the director's problem to apply it. He may learn much about empathic motor responses by observing people and their reactions, by analyzing the most common dreams—for they reveal the experiences, motives, and desires of men, their fears and inhibitions—and especially by studying the behavior of children. But in noting these things and in trying to apply them in such manner as to strengthen the pleasurable empathies he must be constantly on his guard lest he destroy another factor essential to æsthetic appreciation—the factor of artistic detachment or, as Langfeld calls it, "æsthetic distance."



## *The Principle of Æsthetic Distance*

MOTOR impulses may be roughly classified in two groups: those which are participative, and those which are non-participative. An impulse to dodge an approaching automobile is participative, or an impulse to ward off a blow, or to greet a friend, or to catch a ball, or to hiss the villain in a play, or to shout a warning to the heroine. In a response of this type one feels himself involved with the subject matter, not merely in imagination but in reality; he is himself a part of the situation to which he is responding. But an impulse to feel out the lines of a painting imitatively, or to beat time to the music of a band, or to follow the movements of a character in a play with one's own muscle patterns is quite different; one experiences a certain attitude of detachment, participating in imagination perhaps, but not in actuality.

It is this attitude of detachment which Langfeld calls "æsthetic distance," and which seems to him essential to the appreciation of beauty. He points out, for example, that one may stand on the deck of a ship enjoying the beauty of a stormy sea just as long as he can feel that it does not concern him personally; but the moment an extra large wave threatens to sweep the deck and engulf him he loses his detachment and with it his æsthetic appreciation. Similarly one may take keen pleasure in watching the beauty of an electrical storm—until the lightning strikes too close. In the contemplation of the fine arts a detached attitude is normal and essential, and every conceivable device is employed by the artist to maintain it. The painter encloses his picture in a frame, that it may be set apart from the reality of its surroundings; the sculptor places his statue on a pedestal for the same reason. Each strives to preserve whatever suggestion of reality is necessary to the truth of his message and to the production of the proper empathic response, but no more. All superfluous elements of reality he tries to eliminate, lest they remind the observer too forcibly of his own affairs, and thus destroy his sense of



detachment. For the same reason the illustrator uses a soft pencil or a pen instead of a camera; the dramatic poet makes his characters speak in blank verse; the musician employs abstract sounds. Each, in other words, conventionalizes life in some way, and it seems clear that at least one of the functions of such conventionalization is the preservation of æsthetic distance.

In the first chapter it was pointed out that naturally colored photographs and statues are not æsthetically satisfying in the highest sense. This is because, by bringing reality too close, they destroy æsthetic distance. They may give us great pleasure of a kind—we may like them for what they represent, for good composition and color balance, or for the skill displayed in their making—but they do not appeal to a cultivated sense of beauty in the same way as a drawing or painting. Sometimes they give positive displeasure. Nothing could be more painful, for example, than the hideously “lifelike” wax figures which are so often used for the display of clothing and millinery in our shop windows. For the most part they are characterless in attitude and feature, yet so natural in physical detail as to suggest nothing less than remarkably well-preserved corpses. The best undertakers discovered long ago that a lifelike make-up on a corpse only makes it look more deathlike; but some window decorators have not yet profited by their experience. Fortunately, however, there are signs of improvement, and in recent years more and more shops have been displaying millinery upon grotesquely comic heads, with sharp angular lines, and crude, though soft, colors—caricatures, of course, but interesting and amusing, and much more artistic than the old wax figures because capable of being viewed with æsthetic detachment.

#### THE PLAY INSTINCT

The significance of the detached attitude may be a little clearer, and the conditions under which it is most likely to break down may be better understood, if we think of it in terms of the difference between work and play, between necessity and pleasure.

Two basic traits are universally essential to the survival of any species in any environment: the instinct of self-preservation and the instinct of perpetuation of the species. It happens that the great majority of living creatures are so constituted in relation to their environments that the business of satisfying these two instincts occupies nearly all their time

and energy. Even such comparatively high orders of animals as cows and chickens spend most of their waking hours eking out a living, and if they seem at times to do nothing it is probably only because their bodies are fatigued and need rest. They cannot be said to have an actual surplus of time in which to play, or to develop their social or artistic interests.

The luxury of surplus time is given only to a few species, and only in the highest of these does it seem to have resulted in the development of a well-marked play instinct. The goldfish has plenty of time on his hands, but he does not appear to do much with it. The dog, on the other hand, learns to play—to romp and gambol, to do all sorts of unnecessary things, and to experience a very obvious pleasure in doing them. His play is no doubt physically beneficial—certainly it is not unfavorable to survival, or playful dogs would long since have become extinct—and in that sense it may be only a particularly unconscious manifestation of the instinct to survive. But the point is that the play instinct, from its earliest inception, is based upon leisure time, and upon freedom from any immediate concern about self-preservation.

In its simplest form play is little more than pleasant exercise—exercise not inconsistent with bodily health, yet not consciously related to it. But as intellect increases and life grows more complex, there is need for mental exercise as well as physical. At the same time it becomes increasingly difficult to escape the bitter necessities of existence, because the memory and imagination have been developed, and even though there is plenty of surplus time the worries of life linger in the thoughts. In order to play, man, like any other animal, must have surplus time; but he must also have some means of escaping the pursuing sense of reality. With bodily play this is easy, for the shock of concrete sense impressions demands his attention; and doubtless that is one reason for the great popularity of athletic games. But with mental play man must have something more than an assurance that his life is not immediately at stake; he must have sufficient detachment to take him out of the maze of associated thoughts which are always trying to drag him back into reality. In the most cultivated kind of mental play that we know—the fine arts—he must have the highest and most effective sense of detachment possible. In other words he must have a sense of æsthetic distance.

It may well be asked why the term “distance” is used. The meaning is figurative, of course, referring more to an idea than to a physical

measurement; yet physical distance, or the suggestion of it, is not infrequently the means of maintaining an attitude of detachment. We often back off from an object in order to view it æsthetically, and sometimes we squint at it and try to see it through a kind of haze. We seldom appreciate the full beauty of a valley until we can view it from a distant hill-top, and we are proverbially indifferent to the beauty that may be found at home; "the far-off hills are green." Almost anything beautiful is spoiled for us if we get too close to it, much more so than if we get too far away. There is, of course, no exact distance that is always right; a painting might seem too distant at twenty feet and a mountain too close at a mile. The question is purely relative, the point being that for æsthetic appreciation the distance must be sufficient for the maintenance of a detached attitude.

In one sense the whole matter of a detached attitude is relative. The attitude of a football player is highly detached by comparison with that of a soldier in battle; but that of a spectator at a football game is detached by comparison with that of the player. The fine arts call for more detachment than any other form of play—for such detachment as is possible only to a highly developed imagination. They call, in other words, for the highest type of play attitude. But because, in attitude, they still belong to play rather than to the business of living, less violence is done to the æsthetic attitude when it slips to a lower form of play than when it slips out of the play attitude altogether and into actuality. That point is worth remembering, for it sometimes marks the difference between crude art and a morbid realism that is not art at all.

#### ÆSTHETIC DISTANCE IN THE THEATRE

In the modern theatre the sense of æsthetic distance is very strong and very definite. The elevated stage serves not only to enhance visibility but also to set the play apart from the audience as a statue is set apart on its pedestal. The proscenium arch, or "picture frame," serves the same function. Usually the stage is brightly lighted while the auditorium is darkened, and there is a curtain which is raised or drawn aside only during the actual performance of a scene. All these things put together tend to offset the effect of reality created by the use of living actors, and to maintain a sense of detachment on the part of the audience.

At the present time the art of acting is very sharply distinguished from

the art of oral reading. The distinction is not a matter of form or method, of costume, make-up, or scenery, or the lack of them, or of the presence or absence of supporting actors; it is altogether a matter of æsthetic distance.

In reading, the audience and reader are in partnership, enjoying the book together. There is æsthetic distance, but the reader and the audi-

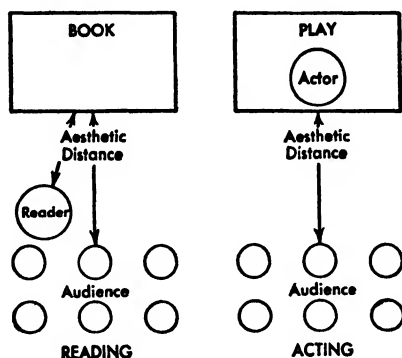


FIG. 1. DISTINCTION BETWEEN  
READING AND ACTING.

ence are on the same end of it; the book is on the other. The reader is really one of the audience, in constant communication with the rest and sharing his enjoyment of the reading with them. Being in possession of the book—or of the memorized text—he is in a situation of leadership, but he is in no sense a part of the book himself; there is no pretense or illusion about his identity, and no detachment in his audience's attitude toward him. He may go very far in enlivening his reading by play of voice, gesture, and facial expression, so long as what he does is clearly suggestion; but he must avoid an attitude of exhibition, since that would at once put him on the wrong end of the æsthetic distance.

The actor on the other hand is part of the play, and very much on exhibition—not in his own identity, but in that of the character he represents. His own personality is suppressed or discarded; there is no sense of direct communication between him and his audience, for they are in the world of reality and he is in the world of imagination. The æsthetic distance is between the audience and the play; and the actor, unlike the reader, is on the play end of it. For the actor to “step out of the picture”

in any way, or to establish any sort of direct communication with his audience, is to break down the basic convention of modern acting.

It is true that these distinctions were not always as clear as they are today. In the public theatre of Elizabethan times, for example, there was no proscenium arch, and there were no footlights to throw a glamour of unreality about the actor. In the private theatres the actors did not have the stage all to themselves, for young men of wealth and fashion insisted upon platform seats.<sup>1</sup> Elizabethan audiences, especially in the public theatres, were boisterous and unruly, voicing disapproval as readily as approval, and laughing loudly at the obscenities and the buffoonery. They did not hesitate to exchange remarks with the actors, and to interrupt a play if they did not like it. Under such circumstances it is doubtful whether the sense of illusion was very highly developed. What there was must have been the result of good drama and powerful individual acting.

Conditions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were even less conducive to a sincere æsthetic attitude in the theatre. The custom of seating the young gallants on the stage persisted even in the public theatres, and when women began to be employed to play the female parts the behavior of the audiences grew even more disorderly. The plays were as licentious as the times; few of the actresses were of good repute, and they flirted openly with the gallants on the stage and in the boxes. Interruptions were frequent, and riotous disturbances in the audience not at all uncommon.

Of course the behavior was not all disorderly. There were good plays and there was good acting, and there was plenty of hearty appreciation of both. But few people seemed to have such a sense of obligation to artistic sincerity and consistency as is taken for granted in our better theatres today. One of the first to feel it was Thomas Betterton; but he was ahead of his time. Not until David Garrick became a power in the English theatre did things begin to change.

It was Garrick who first succeeded in driving the London audience off the stage—inspired, perhaps, by Voltaire, who had instituted a similar reform in France. In so doing he re-created that psychological barrier between actor and audience that is the basis of modern theatrical convention. Like Betterton he abandoned the Elizabethan custom of enter-

<sup>1</sup> For the distinction between public and private theatres see Chapter XVII.

ing out of character and only beginning to act at the center of the stage, and of dropping out of character between speeches. He forbade his actors and actresses to carry on flirtations or conversations with members of the audience, or to establish communication with them in any way. He insisted that they know their parts perfectly. He even required them to dress in such a way as to suggest the characters they portrayed, instead of to display their own charms to advantage—although he made no attempt at historical accuracy in costuming, and himself played Macbeth in the contemporary uniform of a British general. His technique of production was not modern, but he was almost the first to set consistency and sincerity of imagination above mere histrionics, and to approximate a modern sense of æsthetic distance in the theatre.

Most people who love the theatre today—the “legitimate” theatre at any rate—value the artistic sincerity that dates from Garrick. Those who go to the theatre for rough animal play can get all they want in boisterous musical reviews or extravaganzas, especially those that follow the *Hellzapoppin* tradition. Those who go to draw æsthetic pleasure from an artistic representation—or presentation—of life appreciate a sincere, consistent, imaginative effort on the part of the artists, and an orderly, sympathetic attitude on the part of the audience. Yet there are many who ruthlessly condemn the modern theatre for its illusion, its “peephole” realism, its “picture-frame” stage, and who clamor for a return to the greater freedom and spontaneity, the greater intimacy, the more direct theatricalism of the Elizabethan platform or the eighteenth-century fore-stage. It might be well for them to ask themselves whether they would be willing to accept also the loss of æsthetic distance, the coarse jests of unruly audiences, the private flirtations of the actresses, the bombardments of eggs and fruit, the general lack of a sense of obligation to artistic truth and consistency. I seriously doubt the possibility of restoring the one thing without the other.

The modern theatre undoubtedly needs reform and improvement. Everybody admits that it is too commercial. Sometimes it is too realistic; there is too much attempt at illusion. Sometimes there is too much space, too much convention, too little human appeal. But there can be no real progress in throwing away the whole technique by which we have gained a sense of imaginative sincerity and consistency in the theatre. The difficulty is not to be overcome by establishing personal intimacy

between the actor and the audience. Anybody who likes that can satisfy his tastes by attending a floor show in which half-clothed chorus girls come among the tables and fraternize with the audience. That is intimacy—the same kind that so annoyed David Garrick. It does not represent progress in the art of the theatre; it represents reversion to a cruder and coarser age.

#### THE PROSCENIUM AND THE FOURTH WALL

There is one phase of the modern anti-realistic movement in the theatre which is so essentially a problem in æsthetic distance that it demands consideration here. This is the attack on the proscenium or “picture-frame” stage on the ground that it represents a room with the fourth wall removed, an accidental “peephole” view of life pictured with photographic accuracy. Such representation, the critics say, is too realistic, too concrete, too artificial, too flat, too distant. Let us abolish the proscenium arch, therefore, and substitute an apron or platform stage; let us bring the actor out of his frame and restore the plastic, three-dimensional art of older times. Let us abandon the attempt to create illusion, to deceive by pretense; let us make the actor frankly an actor; let us have abstract theatricalism instead of concrete representation. They do not say, let us abolish acting in favor of declamation, but sometimes that is what they appear to mean.

On the whole such propaganda reveals an annoying inconsistency and confusion of thought. That the criticism is the result of severe provocation no one will deny; in their unfavorable reaction to specific abuses the critics are quite generally right. It is in their analysis of causes, their interpretation of conventions, that they seem to go astray.

The proscenium arch is not, and never has been, conventionally representative of a fourth wall removed. The producer who attempts to make it so is guilty of false reasoning and ignorance of theatrical history and psychology, to say nothing of very bad taste. Fortunately this notion is rare, but unfortunately we sometimes find it in high places. When the Moscow Art Theatre, in Act Three of *The Three Sisters*, attempted to suggest the invisible fourth wall by arranging the furniture against the curtain line as if it were backed up against that wall, the device was positively and seriously wrong. The effect was unreal, distracting, and inartistic. Happily, it was not repeated in other Moscow

Art Theatre plays. A still worse effect is usually produced when a house or room is shown on the stage with ceiling and walls broken as if the front had been torn away, and with the surrounding landscape shown realistically at either side and above the roof (Plates 7 and 10-a).

In Eugene O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms*, no less a person than Robert Edmond Jones lent himself to that enormity by putting a whole house on the stage with a landscape background, and then removing various parts of the front wall to expose first one room and then another, and sometimes two or three at a time; as a result some members of the audience gave much of their attention to wondering which section would come out next, and how they were fastened on, and whether the frail-looking house would be able to stand the strain. There was, of course, some excuse for a divided setting in that play to convey the essential irony of certain scenes, but it need not have been so obtrusive.

A more recent but equally obtrusive example was furnished by George Jenkins' setting for *I Remember Mama*, by John Van Druten, as produced by Rogers and Hammerstein. It centered about an open-front house representing an exceedingly vague period in the history of San Francisco. On either side of the broken walls were street spaces through which characters approached the house, stepping up on to a platform which was too obviously a wagon stage; above could be seen the edge of the roof, and above that a soaring back drop, elaborately and beautifully painted with trees and houses on rocky promontories, and subjected to very interesting lighting effects. The whole setting presented an unusual and fascinating spectacle; but the outer half of it was irrelevant, unnecessary, and fearfully distracting. To add to the distraction, the actress playing Katrin (who "doubles" as narrator and as a character in the play) kept running in and out of the setting through the missing front wall, while the other characters were required to use the door in the side wall. A well-known director and writer on theatre arts who saw this play with me leaned over after a few moments and whispered, "Did you ever see so much distraction in one set?"

Something of the same distracting effect occurs every time a two-room scene is shown on the stage with the edge of a division wall staring the audience in the face—no matter how necessary to the action of the play. In the original *Anna Christie* there was a particularly bad arrangement of the kind. The division wall was not brought forward to the curtain



line; it was stopped half way, doubtless for visibility at the sides of the house. But it was evident that the actors on one side could see those on the other, and that when they passed from one room to the other through the door in the partition they were taking the longest route. One worried a little about that, and about the missing portion of the wall, and wondered whether it had gone with the fourth wall wherever the latter had gone. This sensation is always intensified when a divided setting is made to show realistically broken walls, jagged bricks, incomplete roof trusses, and other suggestions of catastrophe. Divided settings are not uncommon, for they lend themselves to many humorous effects, and some dramatic ones; but it is doubtful if they can ever be entirely guiltless of distraction and artistically satisfying.

It should be understood that these remarks refer mainly to divided or broken settings that are essentially realistic. There are other kinds of unfinished settings in which the incompleteness is frankly conventional, and the method frankly suggestive rather than representational. The simplest is that of the spotlighted area on a dark stage (Plate 5, insert). More elaborate, but equally conventional, is the type of unit setting seen against black or neutral draperies, with a mere suggestion of back and side walls, and no ceiling (Plates 14 and 30). The walls may be frankly decorative (Plate 30), or they may be simple flats with their unfinished edges de-emphasized by control of light (Plate 5-b). In either case they are analogous to the soft-edge sketches used by illustrators, rather than to photographs of half-built or badly "blitzed" houses.

Settings of this type make no logical challenge to our sense of realism, and offer no suggestion that an actual fourth wall has been removed. In good theatrical technique there is simply no implication of a fourth wall. The fact that indoor and outdoor scenes are shown through the same proscenium arch should be enough to allay the myth; if the proscenium represents a missing wall in a room scene, what does it represent in a woodland setting? Uprooted trees? A missing fence? A large window in a house on the edge of the woods? Nonsense! Who ever thought of such a thing? Some critics have been strangely troubled by the fact that in the interior setting we see only three sides of the room. But who ever saw more, at one time? A human being does not have eyes in the back of his head; his field of vision is always limited to some three-fourths of a circumference. The convention of the interior setting is not

the convention of an imaginary fourth wall, but that of a very real limitation of the field of vision. The raising of the curtain is not the lifting of a wall but the beginning of a chapter of fiction—a measure of time rather than space.

The function of the proscenium arch is merely to define the limits of the composition, to set it off by separating the fiction of the play from the reality of its surroundings, to prevent the eye from wandering to irrelevant things—in short, to maintain the æsthetic distance. A painting is framed for the same reason. To say that a picture is too flat, or that the perspective is bad, or that the frame is too large, or too ornate, or too conspicuous, is legitimate criticism in either art. But to say that the proscenium arch should be abolished for any of those reasons is just as foolish as to say that we should hang our pictures without frames; to demand that it be replaced in every case by a platform stage is just as ridiculous as to insist that all painting be replaced by sculpture.

There is a place for sculpture, and there is a place for the platform stage. The latter existed before the proscenium arch, and gave way to it only because the arch was more convenient, lent itself to more varied effects, and strengthened æsthetic distance. It is still possible to produce many types of plays effectively and without loss of æsthetic distance on platform stages; Shakespearean plays are well adapted to such a technique, as are most poetic or symbolic plays. Some experimental theatres have achieved very satisfactory results with “circus” or “arena” stages, or with acting areas on the floor level surrounded by spectators, as in the highly successful Penthouse Theatre at the University of Washington (Plate 3). With simplicity, restraint, and good taste, such methods can be as artistic as those of the proscenium stage. They do not necessarily destroy æsthetic distance; they merely change the methods by which it must be maintained. But it is wise to remember that the greatest plastic theatre in history—the theatre of ancient Greece—lent itself readily to burlesque and was much ridiculed in its own time; the comedies of Aristophanes are full of gibes at the unconvincing methods of Athenian tragedy.

When the modernists talk about “freeing the actor from his cage” or “bringing him out of his picture frame” I am always reminded of an exploit I witnessed as a boy in one of the old Hanlon Brothers’ pantomimes, by which an actor really was brought out of the picture. He

was suddenly projected some thirty feet out into the auditorium on the end of a long wooden beam. It was good circus, and fetched a lively scream from the ladies sitting down front; but it was not æsthetically pleasing, and would have been fatal to any notion of imaginative consistency in a real play. The effect is only slightly less destructive when an actor comes too close to the footlights or too far out on the apron of the stage. The spell of a photoplay is often broken when an actor approaches too close to the camera, as if he were about to jump off the screen. In an early experiment with three-dimensional motion pictures, water from a hose appeared to come right out into the audience; the result was an attitude much more nearly hysterical than æsthetic.

The fact is that we do not want the actor to come out of the picture. We want him above everything else to stay in. Usually we find it easier for him to do so when the picture is framed. The frame is not part of the picture, but it defines the limits of the composition and establishes the proper æsthetic distance. A statement by James McNeill Whistler, cited by Arthur Symons and by Langfeld, is apropos: "The one aim of the unsuspecting painter is to make his man 'stand out' from the frame—never doubting that, on the contrary, he should, and in truth absolutely does, stand *within* the frame—and at a depth behind it equal to the distance at which the painter sees his model. The frame is, indeed, the window through which the painter looks at his model, and nothing could be more offensively inartistic than this brutal attempt to thrust the model on the hither-side of this window!"

The same principle applies, in different terms, to sculpture, and to the sculptural group on a platform stage.

#### ÆSTHETIC DISTANCE AND THE SENSE OF COMMUNICATION

The arrangements of the stage and setting are after all only incidental elements in the establishment and maintenance of æsthetic distance. The chief element is psychological, and depends upon the actor. To maintain the proper attitude on the part of the audience the actor must consistently and rigidly refrain from any direct communication with them.

To be sure, this principle does not apply to all theatrical entertainment. It seldom applies to the comic scenes of vaudeville and musical extravaganza, or to the humorous monologue. But these types of entertainment are not properly classified as acting, no matter how worthy

or well done. By acting is meant the attempt to present a play with imaginative consistency.

An actor must, of course, convey the author's meaning to his audience. He must do more: he must convey a very subtle suggestion of appreciation of that meaning; that is his service as an interpretative artist. He must not appear visibly to enjoy the play as a spectator, yet he must somehow suggest an attitude of enjoyment to the observer. At the same time he must seem to be, not himself, but the character he represents, and as such he must seem to belong to another world, the world of fiction, of imagination. The instant he allows a bond of communication to become established between him and his audience the imaginative spell is broken.

I once sat very far from the stage at a production of *The Devil's Disciple*. When Dick Dudgeon swaggered in and dominated the scene I found it very delightful. It was as if he were saying, "Here am I, folks of the play, Dick Dudgeon, a whale of a character." But certain friends of mine who sat near the stage told me later that the effect was spoiled for them by the actor's habit of "mugging"—that is, of looking directly at the audience with a communicative expression. To them it had seemed as if he were saying, "Here am I, ladies and gentlemen of the audience, a whale of an actor." For them æsthetic distance had been destroyed.

In Basil Dean's production of Galsworthy's *The Skin Game* which toured this country in 1921-22 the auction scene was played with the auctioneer facing the audience and pretending to offer them a chance to buy real estate. The actor was a good comedian and the scene was amusing, but the artistic sincerity of the production was shattered. The auctioneer was in actual communication with the audience and apparently anxious to get a real response from them, and one found himself wondering why some irreverent spirit did not take him at face value and offer a bid. And then, just at the end of the scene, some one did so; a confederate in the audience shouted an offer and the sale was closed, while the other members of the audience, instead of paying attention to the play, were looking around and craning their necks to see who had created the disturbance. Nothing could have been more destructive of æsthetic distance. It may be argued, of course, that the artist should have freedom to alter the conventions and to attain pleasing and entertaining effects in any way he sees fit. But was the effect pleasing in this

case? I sent a group of students from a class in play production to see *The Skin Game* and to criticize the stage direction; they had heard no advance comment and had not yet studied æsthetic distance, but nearly all of them condemned the auction scene severely, on the ground that it broke the artistic illusion. "When I go to the theatre," one of them wrote, "I go to sit in the audience; I do not care to be mixed up in the play."

Advocates of the plastic stage have pointed triumphantly to the achievements of the late Max Reinhardt in bringing the action into the audience. In his "Theatre of the Five Thousand" in Berlin, he staged vast tumult scenes with the stage in the center of the auditorium and with actors and supernumeraries mingling with the audience and coming and going in all directions. I never had the pleasure of seeing those productions; but in Reinhardt's New York production of *The Miracle* æsthetic distance was perfectly maintained. There were seven hundred actors, and many of them came and went through the aisles, but they ignored the audience completely and established no sense of communication with them. Because of the mystic character of the play and the remarkable atmosphere of the theatre—remodeled to create the illusion of a cathedral—one could feel himself present in spirit only, or imagine that he was dreaming the whole thing. It was this atmosphere that served the purpose ordinarily served by the picture frame in maintaining æsthetic distance. The success of central arena productions like those of the Penthouse Theatre depends largely upon the maintenance of a similar psychological aloofness balanced against the intimate effect of proximity. Good control of lighting helps, but the essential atmosphere depends chiefly on the actor.

#### ILLUSION IN THE THEATRE

The question of illusion in the theatre seems to be a very confusing one. The abstractionists are constantly berating the realists for attempting to create an illusion of real life on the stage, yet they seem to approve of productions like *The Miracle*, in which there was a more powerful illusion than in most realistic plays.

The truth is that the word illusion is ambiguous: there are really two kinds of illusion. There is the illusion of deception, and there is the illusion of art, and the difference between them is precisely that between

the liar and the actor. The illusion of deception is inartistic and has no place in the theatre, but the illusion of art is the life of the theatre.

The illusion of art is a thing of the imagination. In it there is pretense but no deception. The child expresses it perfectly when he says, "Let's pretend." He has no intention of deceiving anybody, not even himself. It is all a game, with nobody really fooled; but for good sport one must play the game consistently and wholeheartedly, allowing no interference with the imaginative concept. So in the theatre. Nothing is real; nothing is supposed to be. Children of a larger growth are pretending, that is all; but the more completely and sincerely they carry out the pretense—short of actual deception—the more pleasure they get out of it.

Langfeld, as usual, sees the matter clearly:

The question of realism in art has caused much difficulty because it involves ideas that have appeared hard to reconcile. The dramatic critic asks for "real" situations and "real" incidents. He objects to a play that seems artificial, that does not correspond to life, yet we have said that a truly æsthetic enjoyment demands a sense of unreality. The seeming contradiction is readily explained by the fact that the object may be as real, in the sense of true to life, as is consistent with the intent of the artist, but the attitude of the observer should be different from that generally assumed toward the world. If we are able to maintain an æsthetic attitude, the most stirring real play will continue to be a play for us, and the most ultra-realistic picture will continue to be a work of art, and the most lifelike statue will remain for us a series of graceful lines in marble; that is, we shall have maintained our distance, and the object will have remained an object of beauty.

In other words, what is bad in art is not illusion—or the lack of it—*per se*, but loss of æsthetic attitude on the part of the observer. Such illusion as is consistent with æsthetic distance is generally desirable. At the same time it must be borne in mind that imaginative illusion can be very powerfully induced by other means than realism of detail.

#### HOW MUCH ILLUSION?

An æsthetic attitude in the theatre can be destroyed either by too much or by too little illusion. When the scenery is tawdry and unconvincing, when the costumes are too palpably makeshifts, when the acting is feeble, or when somebody steps out of the picture or establishes communication with his audience, there is too little illusion, and one finds it impossible to maintain an æsthetic attitude. When, on the other hand, the scenery is so unnecessarily realistic as to distract attention from the play itself, or

when the acting is so vividly real that one forgets it is acting and takes it for truth, there is too much illusion; the illusion of art has been replaced by deception, and the effect is again unæsthetic.

Actors, directors, and scenic artists not infrequently overdo the attempt to create illusion. Since the only measure of success in the theatre is the response of the audience they very naturally and properly play for such response; but sometimes they forget that not all response is æsthetic. It may, for example, seem like a triumph of art when some member of the audience is so carried away that he forgets himself and laughs or cries aloud, or cheers the hero, or warns him of the villain's approach with a cry: "Look out! Here he comes!"—or otherwise feels himself a participant in the play. As a matter of fact it is not a triumph of art, but a triumph of hollow deception at the expense of art, for art stops short when the observer loses his sense of detachment.

There is a story that one of the famous actresses of England—Mrs. Kendal, if I remember correctly—in playing a scene very like that of the death of her own child, so gave way to emotion herself that the audience could not stand the realism of it, and a woman stood up and cried, "No more! No more!" Highly emotional scenes always involve some risk of thus destroying distance and creating an undesirable sense of reality.

The more abstract or the more conventional the type of artistic presentation, the greater the sense of unreality, and the easier it is to maintain æsthetic distance. Sometimes there seems to be actual pleasure in an illusion of unreality about something one knows to be real. The Parade of the Wooden Soldiers in the famous *Chauve Souris*, for example, seemed to please people of all ages and all degrees of culture. One knew, of course, that the soldiers were real men, but the illusion of woodenness was so perfect that one became a child again, with a child's delight in a toy. However, I recall a distinct loss of æsthetic distance and æsthetic pleasure upon one occasion when a member of the wooden army lost his balance slightly, and for the instant became quite human in the effort to regain it; for me the illusion was spoiled, and I felt an unpleasant shock in being suddenly reminded that the soldier was not really unreal (Plate 9).

The highest form of art is in its essence very close to child's play; the difference lies in its being carried out with a skill and consistency sufficient to satisfy the more critical imaginations of adults. The *Chauve Souris*

was largely child's play, performed with great skill and good taste, and it delighted the most cultivated and artistic audiences of England, France, and America, as well as Russia. Balieff, its creator, is dead; but it is to be hoped that some survivor of his company will re-create that work of art before the tradition is irrevocably lost. In a somewhat similar way, *The Yellow Jacket*, by Hazleton and Benrimo, makes use of the highly naïve, "let's pretend" attitude of the Chinese theatre, and, in spite of the distractions created by the Property Man, gives keen æsthetic pleasure even to a sophisticated American audience. It is a fact often lost sight of by modern producers, that a simple technique not only proves more stimulating to the imagination and more productive of illusion than an elaborate one, but renders the task of maintaining æsthetic distance vastly easier.

Illusion is after all a relative matter, and no definite technique can be specified for maintaining it in all cases. But it may safely be said that whatever tends to distract the attention from the main idea or to disrupt the imaginative concept, tends to destroy illusion and to spoil the æsthetic attitude. It is remarkable how much the imagination can do with the barest suggestion, provided only that there is no distracting influence to recall reality or otherwise disturb the attitude of detachment. It may even be said that the stimulation of the imagination is the easy part of play production, while the hard part is the suppression of the many distracting influences that are potential enemies of æsthetic distance.

#### THE ACTOR AS A SOURCE OF DISTRACTION

One of the worst sources of distraction in the theatre is too much emphasis on the identity of the individual actor. When the audience recognizes an actor not as the character he represents, but as a favorite actor—as Tyrone Power, or Franchot Tone, or Paul Robeson—there is an obvious interference with the illusion. Up to a certain point this may be beneficial, as a defense of æsthetic distance against too much illusion of reality. But in the modern commercial theatre it is often carried so far that it interferes seriously with the imaginative concept. The star system leads one to think of Helen Hayes as Helen Hayes rather than as Maggie Wylie, or Viola, or Queen Victoria. In discussing a play one finds himself using the actor's name instead of the character's name; often he cannot even recall the latter. The greater the emphasis upon the star



and the more unchanging his or her personality in different parts, the greater the strain on imaginative illusion.

The screen is even worse than the stage in exploiting actors instead of characters. Bette Davis is a hard-working and versatile actress, but she is always Bette Davis to her admirers; nobody remembers her as Elizabeth, or Mildred, or Caroline, or Miss Moffat.<sup>2</sup> Spencer Tracy is Spencer Tracy to every small boy; why bother one's head with his various fictitious names? Perhaps it does not matter so much in comedy, especially low comedy; perhaps it is right that Ed Wynne should always be Ed Wynne, and Jimmy Durante always Jimmy Durante. But in a serious play it does matter that the audience should be utterly unable to think of a character as such. For a time some of the more artistic producers seemed to realize this, and many photoplays were released with no stars featured, and with no mention of the actors except in the list at the beginning; and in some instances the names of the actors were even omitted altogether, in order to concentrate attention on the characters. The latter plan seems a bit extreme, for a reasonable interest in knowing who did the good work is not inconsistent with an æsthetic attitude; a better plan would be to give the cast at the end of the film, or to provide the audience with printed programs, or to post the cast in the lobby of the theatre. But apparently the movie-goers prefer star-worship to imaginative consistency, and most film producers have gone back to the old method.

Bad as the star system is, it is no more destructive of illusion than the stock company, especially the neighborhood stock company with each actor a local favorite. In a stock production the action is usually suspended ten or twelve times in the first act while each member of the company in turn steps out of the picture to acknowledge his "reception." The greater his disguise, the more hilarious the shout of recognition from his admirers. Illusion is almost impossible under such circumstances, and if there are moments when the audience is profoundly moved by the play it is because of unusually good acting or because of the more rugged imaginations of the unsophisticated. The ordinary cheap stock company thrives, of course, only where a higher form of art would starve to death;

<sup>2</sup> In the files of *Theatre Arts* I found descriptions of nine characters played by Bette Davis in as many films, but in only one—*Elizabeth the Queen*—was the name of the character mentioned. I asked some fifteen of my movie-mad friends, all great admirers of Bette Davis, for the names of some of her parts, and not one could name a single character she had played!

it furnishes relatively uncultivated audiences with a healthy form of play, but the attitude it induces is not, as a rule, highly æsthetic. Sometimes the convincingness of even the most popular type of play is jeopardized by the stock company sort of intimacy.

On one occasion I remember seeing a revival of *The Bat* performed by a neighborhood stock company. When the mysterious shrouded figure skulked across the darkened stage in the last act and the whole point of the play rested upon his identity remaining undiscovered, a naïve enthusiast in the audience, recognizing some familiar mannerism, shouted out: "That's John Lott!"—mentioning, significantly enough, the actor and not the character, and of course giving the plot away completely.

In amateur production there is something of the same difficulty—intensified perhaps by the fact that the actors are personal acquaintances of the audience. On the other hand, many amateur groups choose more serious plays than the stock companies, and at least aim at a higher level of artistic sincerity. The result, provided always that the acting is reasonably good, is apt to be less exploitation of personality and a more consistent imaginative illusion.

The repertory system, whether amateur or professional, is always open to the objection that the oftener one sees and recognizes an actor in different roles, the harder it becomes to accept the illusion in each new role; what the star system does to destroy illusion with respect to one actor the repertory system tends to do with respect to all. Perhaps it is to overcome this tendency that the Moscow Art Theatre company traditionally takes such pains with make-up, costume, and all details of characterization, and refuses to tolerate applause or curtain calls during the play, or anything else likely to destroy illusion. The fine work of this organization proves that the repertory system can with proper care be made consistent with the highest degree of æsthetic distance; nevertheless, the use of the same actors in successive plays, or in two or more parts in the same play, is essentially a disadvantage and must be compensated for in other ways if the proper illusion is to be maintained.

#### EXTERNAL AIDS AND HINDRANCES TO ILLUSION

The vogue of the Moscow Art Theatre and its visits to the United States a few years ago strengthened a movement already begun in this country to discourage receptions, curtain calls, interrupting applause, and

such sources of distraction. Within reason the movement is a wise one, but when it results in applause from one half of the audience and indignant cries of "Sh! Sh!" from the other, it is probable that there is more loss than gain. In planning a reform it is always well to consider the alternative. Confusion and ill feeling may be more detrimental to the æsthetic attitude than old-fashioned honest applause, and when we remember that the latter has some real value in stimulating the actor it would seem unwise to abolish it altogether. Personally I should like to see the reception abolished, and applause somewhat restrained except at the ends of acts. There is no serious loss of distance when real curtain calls are spontaneously given and gracefully received, provided they are taken *in character*—as they are by most sincere players today. But there is a very distinct loss when an actor steps out of character to deliver a curtain speech before the end of the play. The effect is not so serious in light comedy, and perhaps not in classic repertory where one knows the play by heart anyway; but in a serious realistic play, given for the first time, it is in very bad taste. A few of our best actors still do it, perhaps because they are old-timers and cling to the traditions of an earlier generation.

There is one thing that may be said in favor of curtain speeches and of many other elements of intimacy, and that is that they do make for a warmer relationship between actor and audience, a greater human sympathy. This in itself is good, provided the distraction is not too great. The older dramatists used to solve the problem by means of a prologue or induction of some sort. An actor came before the curtain not as an actor but as a speaker—a sort of master of ceremonies, to put the audience in a proper mood and adjust them to the requisite point of view. Modern counterparts have often been successful. The one-man "Chorus" in *The Yellow Jacket* plays a very important part in establishing and maintaining æsthetic distance; while pretending to be the manager of the play he is in reality the leader of the audience, teaching them step by step how to appreciate the play, and appreciating it with them. A very similar function is performed by the Stage Manager in *Our Town*, and by the Narrator in most radio plays. In none of these instances, however, does the person who addresses the audience have to step out of a realistic picture to do so, as in the case of an ordinary curtain speech.

A great many producers today have abolished the orchestra music be-

tween the acts, on the ground that it interferes with the atmosphere of a serious play; but of course this is a very thin disguise for a doubtful form of economy. It may be true that a bad orchestra playing cheap trashy music is detrimental to the atmosphere of a beautiful play, but the obvious remedy is a good orchestra playing appropriate music. Even the worst music is preferable to dull, cheerless silence, broken only by chatter and small talk and the horrid cries of chocolate vendors; for at least it preserves a suggestion of the play attitude, and distinguishes the theatre from the railway station. Moreover, there is a definite function of relief—mental and physical—performed by the theatre orchestra; it checks the destruction of æsthetic distance through too much and too powerful illusion, and the more serious the play the more important this function. If the managers could but realize how many former theatre-goers have been driven away by the dismal intermissions they might not marvel so much at the spectacle of people paying high prices to see talking pictures with full orchestral accompaniment; or at the public preference for second-rate reviews and extravaganzas over first-rate drama.

#### THE ARTISTIC BALANCE

Hardly anything is to be gained in art by going to extremes, for art is essentially a matter of balance. It has often been observed that we take the greatest pleasure in a combination of the real and the imaginary, the familiar and the strange, the true to life and the true to art. That which is totally unfamiliar is uninteresting because it is meaningless; it gives us no basis of comparison. That which is totally familiar is uninteresting because it is monotonous and humdrum. Interest lies always in a balance of the extremes. It may be that such a balance is pleasurable because it permits us to empathize without losing æsthetic distance. The familiar element, besides giving us the thrill of recognition, stirs our empathic responses, while the unfamiliar preserves the consciousness of detachment.

I do not insist that empathy and æsthetic distance offer a complete explanation of our pleasure in the fine arts, but it seems probable that they are essential elements of such pleasure. Certainly they strike a balance. In the theatre it is the director's business to see that this balance is maintained, and that neither element is allowed to exclude the other.

In that simple statement lies the solution to nine-tenths of the major problems involved in effective and artistic stage direction.



## *Play Production as Design*

SO FAR we have been considering, somewhat abstractly, the nature of the æsthetic appeal in the theatre, and the artistic ideals and purposes in play production. We have now to consider the matter of translating these into actuality through plan and execution.

Creative planning or composition in the fine arts is generally spoken of as Design, and in the schools of fine arts it is treated as a separate study with its own body of principles and precepts. These principles and precepts hold good for every fine art, no matter what the medium; and one of the most valuable lessons an artist can learn is that good design is good design, whether the object is a poem, a temple, or a woman's hat.

In the theatre the problem of design is especially complex, because of the composite nature of the art and the large number of elements that have to be considered and put in order. The black-and-white artist designs in line and mass; the painter in line, mass, and color; the musician in melody, harmony, and rhythm; the poet in words and meter; the dancer in bodily movement and gesture. But the stage director must often design in all of these elements at once. It is inconceivable—and unnecessary—that he should be so expert in all arts as to compete with the specialists, but it would seem particularly essential that he know the underlying principles of good design common to all of them. Without such knowledge he can hardly hope to achieve a consistently unified and pleasing effect.

Curiously, however, the principles of design, as such, are seldom taught in the schools of dramatic art, and seldom treated in the books on play production. The best courses in design are to be found in the schools of industrial art and particularly in the schools of architecture; and most of the good books on design have been written by persons trained in architecture, painting, or sculpture rather than in poetry, drama, or the theatre. Organized principles of design seem to play very

little part in theatrical discussion, even in relation to the professional theatre, and one is led to wonder how many of our directors, actors, and critics have ever read a book on design or taken a course in design.

#### THE ORIGINS OF DESIGN

The best way to study the principles of design is to consider the origin and growth of primitive art. It is a matter of common observation that primitive art is nearly always good art. Bad art is generally a product of insincerity, and insincerity flourishes best in a sophisticated civilization. There is, for example, almost no parallel in the art of primitive peoples for the meaningless gingerbread architecture of 1850 to 1890.

If the reader doubts this, let him spend an afternoon in some good museum of archeology, one containing a large collection of implements, pottery, clothing, and the like, representing the culture of a comparatively simple race—the American Indian, for example. He will observe that while many of the implements are crude, judged by modern standards of manufacture, they are well and effectively made to serve their original purpose; also that they are ornamented in a simple but attractive way, suggesting that their makers took real pleasure in the work and in the product, aiming to satisfy their sense of beauty as well as their sense of utility. But he will seldom, if ever, find an instance in which the primitive designer allowed his sense of ornament to run away with his sense of utility, or allowed himself to indulge in orgies of meaningless elaboration. Grotesqueries he will find, of course, wild flights of imagination and fancy, but almost invariably subordinated to the purpose for which the object was intended, or to the ideas of magic potency associated with that purpose.

When primitive man made a bow and arrow, for instance, he wanted first of all a bow and arrow that would work, for he knew that his life might depend upon it. He chose the kind of wood that gave the strongest spring, but if there were several kinds equally good he chose the kind which also looked best and pleased him most. If he needed something to keep the dampness out he looked about him for some resinous substance that would serve as a varnish, the best he could find for the purpose. But if there were several substances equally effective he chose the kind that best lent itself to ornamentation—the most highly colored kind, for instance; or perhaps he used several kinds, of different colors, working

them out into a design. Finding that his bow could be improved by wrapping certain parts of it with rawhide or reeds, he chose the best materials for the purpose, but when several colors would do equally well he alternated them or interwove them into a design. The purpose of the design might be to give pleasure or to invoke the powers of magic; doubtless the latter purpose came first. The more dependent the craftsman was upon his bow as a weapon the more affection he lavished upon its construction, and the more pains he took to give it magic power and beauty. The small boy today does very similar things to his hockey stick or tennis racquet, and from about the same motives.

While the warrior was engaged in making his bow the woman was busy, perhaps, in making baskets or pottery. She also aimed first at utility and only secondarily at beauty. She also used the materials at hand—reeds for the basket, clay for the pottery—and she developed the ornament out of the same materials. The earliest potters in all parts of the world worked their designs out of different colored clays; it was only in a later, more sophisticated, and less honest age that they learned to paint imitations of those designs on the surface.

In the development of ornament primitive peoples drew naturally on their observation of things about them, and particularly upon nature. Human life furnished some of the motifs, but most of them were drawn from flowers, birds, animals, trees, mountains, rivers, the sun, the moon, or the stars. It is noteworthy, however, that these motifs were conventionalized almost from the first. Since the ornamentation was usually associated with religion or magic there was no serious attempt at pictorial realism. When primitive men sought to portray actuality it was usually to convey a message of some kind; in their arts they were content with the crudest suggestion, and concerned chiefly with fitting the ornament into some general scheme. If they wanted to decorate a bow with the figure of an alligator they did not distort the bow to portray the alligator correctly; they distorted the alligator to decorate the bow. It is possible that this is the origin of conventionalization in the arts; certainly it is the origin of many conventional motifs familiar in historic ornament.

The subject of primitive art is a fascinating one and will repay a great deal of study. The more one sees of the work done by the earliest designers in all parts of the world, the more respect he feels for their simplicity, sincerity, and good taste, and the more he begins to realize that

the problem of good design today is how to achieve a similar quality in the face of the complexities and perplexities of modern life.

Two facts about primitive design stand out above all others: first, the artist's fidelity to his utilitarian purpose, and second, his fidelity to his materials. The opinion appears to be unanimous among writers on design that these two elements are natural and basic in the history and psychology of art, and that no sound achievement in design is possible without them.

#### THE UTILITARIAN BASIS

To say that all good design is founded upon a basis of utility is seemingly to contradict the opinion previously maintained concerning artistic detachment and the purely æsthetic purpose of the fine arts. The contradiction, however, can be reconciled.

It must be remembered that design did not begin with the fine arts. It began long before the fine arts, in the days when men were still too preoccupied with the struggle for existence to indulge in art for art's sake. There was a strong play impulse among primitive men, but it existed for a long time as applied to the useful arts before it resulted in the development of separate arts entirely given to the purposes of æsthetic pleasure. The early artists whose work we so much admire were thus not artists at all in the narrower sense of that word; they were craftsmen, men who worked with their hands to produce useful articles and to satisfy their actual needs, but who took pleasure in doing their work well and beautifully.

We still have the craftsmen; we still make useful articles and endeavor to beautify them at the same time. Good design in the crafts still means, above all, fidelity to the structural purpose of the object, whether a building, a piece of furniture, or an evening gown. Refinement and enrichment we expect, but they must be kept subordinate to utility.

At the same time we have given freer rein to our play impulses by establishing certain special arts such as music, painting, and the drama, which have no other purpose than to give pleasure. All of them began as useful arts with some ulterior application—a religious one in many cases—but by a process of evolution they have become independent and æsthetic. All of them, however, still make use of design, and good design in the fine arts is identical in principle with good design in the useful arts. Fi-



delity to the utilitarian purpose means, in the fine arts, fidelity to the *main* purpose, whatever that happens to be—to the central idea or emotion which it is the aim of the artist to convey. It is just as essential for the fine artist to know what he is trying to do as it is for the craftsman; and it is just as essential that he subordinate his love of elaboration and ornament to the main or fundamental idea.

This, then, is the first lesson that the stage director can learn from the primitive craftsman. How often does one find in a theatrical performance anything like the rugged simplicity and directness, the sheer beauty of form, the sincerity of method, which are so easy to find in the glass cases of any good archeological museum? How often can he feel that at no point in the play has the director or the actor forgotten the chief message of the play? There can be no question that many stage directors, amateur and professional, are seriously in need of just this simple lesson.

In the theatre the utilitarian purpose is simply the purpose of the play: the telling of a given story, or the expounding of a given theme. Good design in play production is design in which the director shows the same regard for his main business that the primitive man showed in making his bow, and the same unwillingness to sacrifice the main business to ornament in even the slightest degree.

#### FIDELITY TO MATERIALS

The second lesson which the stage director may learn from the primitive craftsman is that of fidelity to the natural limitations of means, methods, and materials; and it is a lesson even more urgently needed in our theatres than the first one.

The primitive craftsman used the materials that were at hand, the kinds of wood, clay, or stone that were natural to the soil he lived upon. He used them not only for the structural elements but also for ornamentation, because he built his ornamentation out of the structural elements.

In modern art the ornamentation is too often but a vestigial remnant of the more organic ornament of earlier times, and sometimes it is not even that. Sometimes it is purely extraneous decoration plastered on from the outside and composed of cheap and unrelated materials. Almost everything today is an imitation of something else; even the most substantial-looking stone buildings are built first of steel and the stone

hung on afterwards. Some years ago we began imitating stone with terra cotta and plaster; later we imitated even the plaster with sheet iron or copper. The point is not that we used sheet iron or copper, but that in using a new material we tried to pretend that it was something else; and instead of developing a structural and ornamental design appropriate to the new material we borrowed lamely from the design belonging to the old.

It is a sign of real progress that the architects and industrial designers, at least, are beginning to get away from this and to develop new designs appropriate to the new materials.

Of course it will never be possible to return completely to the rigid simplicity of primitive times, nor is it, perhaps, desirable. It is not necessary to confine ourselves to materials accidentally at hand when better materials may be obtained. Indeed, with improved methods of transportation everything is, in a sense, at hand. It is not necessary, and not possible, to reject the suggestions that come to us from other arts, or other races, or other ages, in order to build up an honest and sincere art of our own. We need not and cannot follow the methods of primitive craftsmen with literal accuracy.

What we can do is realize that there are natural limitations connected with every art, and that the sincere artist recognizes these limitations, whatever they are, and abides by them. He does not struggle uselessly to transcend them, but seeks rather to turn them to account, to make conventions of them, and to find actual beauty in them.

This is a lesson that some would-be artists never learn. They sputter and storm at all limitations and conventions, and strive ceaselessly for some sort of "new freedom"—which means, more often than not, freedom from the obligation to hard work and painstaking study. In their efforts to attain the new freedom they often give us merely incoherence, tawdry imitation, and bad craftsmanship, and call it—quite accurately, perhaps—self-expression. They seem to miss the obvious fact that the greatest artists have never needed much of that sort of freedom; that they have always found true freedom, not in servile unoriginality, but in a sane and honest recognition of natural limitations. It would not be too much to say that the limitations make the freedom, for they relieve the artists of the necessity to attempt the impossible.

The true artist, like the true craftsman, first considers his purpose;

secondly he considers the medium in which he is to work, choosing it in accordance with his purpose; and lastly he considers the possibilities and limitations of the medium. If his medium is the pencil he does not try to make it do what only the brush can do; if it is the brush, he does not try to make it imitate the work of the camera. If his medium is the motion picture he does not make it a clumsy imitation of the stage play; he develops it according to its own capabilities, recognizing that though it may lack some elements of appeal to be found in the stage play, it can do many things that the stage can not. Workers in the field of television will do well to learn the same lesson and develop their own art instead of treating it as radiated motion pictures or illustrated radio.

The stage director, working in an art that is a combination of many others, is constantly tempted to borrow indiscriminately from those others—to use beautiful settings, beautiful costumes, beautiful lighting effects, beautiful music, simply because they are beautiful, and without regard to their effect on the development of the central idea. He, almost more than any other artist, is in need of the lessons to be drawn from a study of primitive design. Fidelity to the main thought or purpose, and fidelity to the natural limitations of material—those are the fundamentals upon which he must build if he is to achieve an art that is honest.

But there is much more to the study of design than these fundamentals. The experience of several thousand years has naturally enabled those engaged in creative art to observe some of the possibilities and limitations of the human mind, and some of the peculiarities of human response, and as a result of such observation to formulate certain working principles of good composition.

Among the best known and most universal are those of Unity, Emphasis, Rhythm, Balance, Proportion, Harmony, and Grace. All of these are broad enough to find equal application in all the arts, and psychologically sound enough to be beyond question. It goes without saying that the stage director should understand them.

### UNITY

The principle of unity, as the name indicates, is the principle of oneness or singleness of thought; it is perhaps the most widely recognized of the principles of composition.

That the mind naturally seeks unity doubtless everyone will agree; the ancients observed the fact and modern psychologists have rediscovered it and proved it by laboratory tests. It would seem that singleness of effect is, if not essential, at least conducive to understanding, to interest, and to æsthetic pleasure.

In the matter of understanding it is evident that, all other things being equal, the mind can more readily grasp a single idea than several ideas at the same time. Many people, while admitting this, still neglect the principle because the observance of it involves some effort, and because it seems to them that after all one can think of several things at once if necessity demands it.

Laboratory tests do not seem fully to support this theory. They seem rather to show that the mind is extraordinarily limited in the perception of even the simplest sort of multiplicity—the multiplicity of elementary units in a group, for instance. Most people can distinguish between a two-spot and a three-spot at cards or dice by what seems to be a single act of perception; but few, if any, can distinguish a nine from a ten except by some analytical or associative process—by counting, or by mental division into two fours and a one, or by recognition of a familiar pattern. The Braille system of reading for the blind is based upon the belief that direct perception is limited to groups of four or five elements, or six at the outside limit. In other words, in the effort to grasp several things at once, the mind finds itself limited to very small groups of the simplest units.

As for more complex ideas, it has been pretty clearly shown that the mind can give attention to but one at a time, and that whenever it appears to carry two simultaneously it is really alternating between them, very rapidly perhaps, but none the less distinctly. It is obvious that the result of such alternation must be some loss of efficiency, however slight, accompanied by some mental strain. For clarity of understanding, therefore, unity is desirable.

For interest it is equally desirable, because interest depends upon attention, and lack of unity represents diffusion of attention. The greatest enemy of attention is distraction, and lack of unity is distracting because it is constantly calling the attention away from one thing to consider another. The mind quickly tires of this and loses interest.

But while a lack of unity is injurious to interest, a unity which is too

simple and obvious is no less injurious in another way. We all know the effect of monotony: any attempt to give constant attention to that which does not change results either in mind-wandering or in hypnotic sleep. Singleness in itself, though an aid to clarity, is not conducive to sustained interest. Sustained interest lies rather in the discovery of singleness in multiplicity, of unity in variety. This is the reason why a symphony is more permanently interesting than a popular song. The latter may seem more interesting on first hearing or tenth hearing, but we soon master all there is of it and it ceases to give us fresh stimuli. The symphony, however, contains many elements, and after fifty hearings we still find our interest engaged by the problem of discerning the unity in the variety. Of course the unity must be there, but it must not be too simple or obvious. It is commonly said that one's interest in a composite idea is proportional to the number and variety of elements that are disciplined into a single effect.

There is still another way in which the need of unity is felt in the fine arts, and that is with respect to æsthetic pleasure as we have tried to define it. If our sense of beauty is largely dependent upon empathic response it will be apparent that a lack of unity is likely to be unpleasant in that it will provoke responses that are not unified. It has been demonstrated in the laboratory that conflicting empathies create physical shocks and strains. Langfeld reports an experiment in which an observer was asked to admire a picture, which after a time was suddenly removed and replaced by another just like it but symmetrically reversed. The result was a distinct physical shock. We all know the empathic effect of a discord in sound or color. Whenever there is lack of unity there is danger of unpleasant empathy, and unpleasant empathy is what, in the fine arts, we are for the most part striving to avoid.

In the theatre our pleasure is often lessened by disunity. One of the most interesting and unusual plays of the modern theatre, Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, fell short of greatness chiefly because the third act—excellent in itself—was badly out of key with the first two in style and theme, and destroyed the unity of the whole.

It is not necessary to accept the Greek notion that all æsthetic pleasure is based upon the discovery of unity in variety in order to appreciate the fact that unity of effect does play a considerable part in enabling us to enjoy the fine arts, including the art of the theatre.

## EMPHASIS

The principle of emphasis is most often met with, by name at least, in the study of rhetoric; but it is really quite as universal in the arts as any other. It is the principle of appeal to attention through intensification of sense impressions. Important elements of composition are to be given conspicuous positions to appeal to the eye, or conspicuous inflections to appeal to the ear; they are to be "pointed up" that they may not escape attention.

In written discourse emphasis is largely attained through the placing of important words at the beginning or the end of each sentence or paragraph, those being the positions most likely to catch the eye. The dramatist, assisted by the director, is carrying out the same principle when he tries to provide an effective opening scene and a strong "curtain" for each act of a play. The painter finds his points of emphasis in the high lights, the contrasts, or the effects of converging lines—the spots that naturally claim the attention of the observer—and into those spots he puts the important elements of the pictorial idea. The emphatic position in any type of composition is the position that makes the greatest claim upon the senses and provides the strongest stimulus to renewed attention.

In the theatre well-balanced emphasis is a constant need and a difficult problem. Here a story is told briefly—much more so than in a novel, for instance—under conditions that are not always favorable to steady attention. If the play is to convey its message in the short time allotted, the important elements of the story must be so pointed up that nobody can possibly miss them, and in this the dramatist needs every bit of help the director can give him.

The dramatist, as a rule, employs the methods of the writer to gain emphasis, including such rhetorical devices as the exclamation, the periodic sentence, the suspended climax, and the leading question. He likewise provides, or suggests, most of the major dramatic emphasis by his arrangement of situations, character contrasts, and conflicts of motive.

The actor points up important lines or scenes by means of vocal emphasis, gesture, pause, and all the devices of the orator, as well as by action and stage business, and the importance of his work in this respect can hardly be exaggerated.

But the director must oversee and coordinate all these, and at the same

time provide other means of emphasis when these are not sufficient. There are endless possibilities of emphasis in the theatre through control of line, mass, color, light, force, tempo, movement, and music; and many of these escape the attention of the dramatist because he cannot visualize everything in advance, and of the actor because his attention is too deeply concentrated on his own part. It is in the adjustment of emphasis that the director performs one of his most valuable functions, and one that can only be performed in actual rehearsal. Some of his problems in this connection will be analyzed in later chapters, especially the chapter on Control of Attention.

### RHYTHM

A third principle of composition is that of rhythm. Rhythm is usually defined as periodicity or pulsation, or the more or less regular recurrence of emphasis. Whenever stress or accent recurs periodically, or whenever there is a discernible alternation of strong and weak, or high and low, or positive and negative, or light and dark, or fast and slow, or of any other contrasting elements, we have a form of rhythm.<sup>1</sup>

The appeal of rhythm is easily explained by the fact that we ourselves are rhythmic creatures. The pulsations of the blood are rhythmic, respiration is rhythmic, and most of our bodily activities such as walking, running, swimming, rowing, hammering, sawing, sweeping, and so on tend to be rhythmic. In other words our habitual motor activities are trained, tuned, and accustomed to rhythm.

When we contemplate an object of beauty we experience imitatively the motor responses suggested by it. If those responses are rhythmic they tend to fit in with the natural experience of the body, and it is not difficult to see that they are more likely to be pleasing than if they fail to fit in. Everyone is familiar with the manifestation of this principle in our ready appreciation of music, especially martial music or dance music. The more obvious the rhythm the better we like it on first hearing; less obvious rhythms are baffling at first because we have difficulty in adjusting our bodily responses to them, though once mastered they may give

<sup>1</sup> Many artists nowadays use the word rhythm so loosely as to include mood, atmosphere, character, motive, tempo, and what not. They use it, in short, as a summation of all qualities in art. This is partly mysticism and partly vagueness. Rhythm does not imply the exactness of meter, but it does imply some sort of pattern in recurrence; and any vaguer usage impoverishes the language.

us quite as much pleasure as the simpler ones with the added delight of unity discovered in variety. But nothing is more distressing from an æsthetic point of view than a rhythm that is so imperfect or so difficult as ultimately to defy adjustment—a point that some ultra-modern composers seem to have missed.

Many people, though quite accustomed to the idea of rhythm in poetry, music, and dancing, seem unaware that the same principle is involved in every sort of composition, in every arrangement of line, mass, and color, in every inflection of pitch, force, and tempo, in every variation of movement or position. The empathic responses to painting or sculpture are, as we have already seen, less conscious than those to music or dancing, and we are less aware of any rhythmic element in them. But the effect is there, and is no less important because it happens to be subconscious.

In highly conventional art, like music or cubistic painting, the rhythms may be very obvious and direct, and similar elements may be repeated frequently in the same medium. In representative art, however, they must be in some measure concealed, else they tend to distract attention from the subject matter. The painter achieves this concealment by avoiding direct repetition of line or mass in the same medium, and by contriving instead to echo a line of one medium by a line of another—similar, but not the same. The line of a woman's arm may be echoed, not by another arm, but by a fold of drapery or a portion of the sky line; a mass of red may be echoed by a mass of pink or orange, or a dark shade of one color may be echoed by a dark shade of another. On the stage a group of characters may be so arranged that the lines of the setting echo the lines of the group. In plot-building a lesser plot may be made to echo a greater one, as the love of Gratiano and Nerissa echoes that of Bassanio and Portia in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*.

The most obvious use of rhythm in the theatre, apart from music and dancing, is of course that of metrical dialogue. While this departs from naturalism and is more generally suited to abstract or symbolic drama than to realistic, it has a deep and universal appeal; and the success of modern plays like *Winterset*, *Johnny Johnson*, or *The Fall of the City* shows that it may be effectively used even in this prosaic age. The liltingly rhythmic prose of W. B. Yeats, J. M. Synge, and Lennox Robinson is no small part of the charm to be found in the Abbey Theatre plays.



The art of the theatre, being so highly complex, affords a greater variety of possible rhythms than almost any other; at the same time it is so concretely representative that it will not bear rhythms which are too obvious. This spells opportunity for the director who would achieve good design, but it also spells danger, for the temptation to play with rhythms at the expense of meaning is great. In this, as in other matters of design, surprisingly good things may be accomplished by purely negative methods—by avoiding bad rhythms, and by so arranging the different elements that their natural rhythms may not clash with each other or with our bodily rhythms—in other words by not doing the wrong things as much as by doing the right.

Much of our twentieth-century experimental drama provides opportunity for more pronounced rhythms than the older drama, without sacrifice of meaning. In Eugene O'Neill's play *The Emperor Jones*, for instance, there is a persistent rhythm furnished by the beating of a tom-tom, a rhythm that functions, one might almost say, as the nemesis of the play. In Max Reinhardt's spectacle *The Miracle*, there was much rhythm of light and movement in addition to that of the music. More recent examples may be found in the ballet-like procession of umbrellas in *Our Town* (Plate 1-b), the rhythmic flashes and blackouts of *Bury the Dead*, or the symphonic composition of thematic phrases, ballet, and boogie-woogie in Saroyan's *Jim Dandy*. In *The Beggar on Horseback*, by Kaufman and Connolly, there was a remarkable suggestion of the way in which the rhythms of life may enter into a dream. The hero of this play, a young composer, is given an opiate by his physician, and falls asleep to the rhythm of a café orchestra across the street—a rhythm that is anathema to him. There follows a lengthy and fantastic dream through which the same rhythm, heightened and exaggerated, runs on and on until one feels that his whole world has been "jazzed up." The effect here is not distracting in the least; rather it carries the point of the play, and so represents good design. The rhythmic effects, obvious as they are, belong intrinsically to the author's message, and the thoughts and sensations of the audience are swept along together (Plate 18-b).

Perhaps the most stirring use of bold rhythm for truly dramatic effect which it has ever been my good fortune to witness was that in the Ant Scene of the Czechoslovakian morality play, *The World We Live In*, the play in which the Čapek brothers satirized all human life by representing

human beings as insects. In that scene the spirit of modern industrialism and imperialism was epitomized in the movement of countless busy creatures with a restless, relentless, ceaseless rhythm that got under the skin and carried one to a pitch of excitement not often equaled in the theatre.

Even in the simplest and most direct art there are infinite possibilities of rhythmic effect, but with corresponding possibilities of disaster. If the rhythm is made too obvious it may distract attention from the main thought to be conveyed, and the technique of the art may become unpleasantly mechanical. On the other hand if there is not enough rhythm, or if the rhythms are too confused, our motor responses are baffled and we experience a sense of restless futility and dissatisfaction.

### BALANCE

Balance, Proportion, and Harmony are all closely associated with each other and with the principle of Unity, because all involve the same problem of empathic adjustment. The principle of balance has to do, of course, with the maintenance of stability through equalization of contending forces.

The simplest form of balance is the form we call symmetry, which consists of exactly equal grouping on both sides of a central line or plane, each side the reverse of the other (*A, B, Fig. 2*). It is chiefly useful in conventional design, the freer forms requiring balance of a more subtle kind.

In the theatre symmetry is often employed in the designing of formal settings for operas, spectacles, and symbolic plays, and in the grouping of characters and choruses in such productions. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was much more generally employed, even for comparatively realistic plays, than it is today; the normal stage group was triangular, with the important character up stage center as the apex of the triangle, and the minor characters equidistant down right and down left. The modern tendency, however, is away from pure symmetry, even in opera and musical comedy—so much so that when *The Beggar's Opera* was revived a few years ago and played in the eighteenth-century manner it seemed very stiff and strange to us.

A more subtle form of balance than the symmetrical is achieved in design by a modification of the leverage principle. It is well known that

a light weight may be made to balance a heavy one if placed proportionately farther from the fulcrum of a lever. Assuming that the center of a picture represents the fulcrum, the various elements may be grouped according to their apparent or suggested weight in such a way as to satisfy

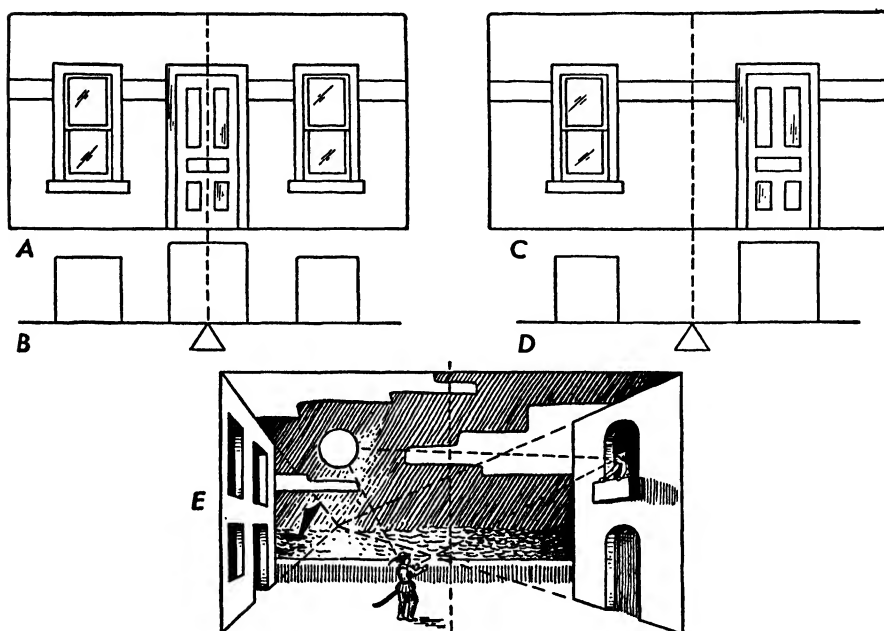


FIG. 2. FORMS OF BALANCE.

*A* and *B* are symmetrical, *C*, *D*, and *E* unsymmetrical but balanced on the center line. *E* illustrates some of the problems of pictorial balance; the triangle connecting the two figures and the moon forms one balanced element; the two buildings with their lines of perspective form another. But note that after a moment the triangular balance becomes less satisfactory because the figures hold interest longer than the moon, and begin to outweigh it.

the sense of balance without even approximating exact symmetry (*C*, *D*, *E*, Fig. 2).

Apparent weight in a picture is governed by such qualities as light and shade, color intensity, size, and suggested movement, as well as by association of ideas. In the theatre all of these must be considered, and in addition we have real movement, speech, and the elements of memory and anticipation to affect our association of ideas. The latter elements are of great importance, and apt to be neglected by the director whose train-

ing has been largely visual; he may fail to realize that a character's importance in the minds of the audience is governed by what has gone before and by what is anticipated, and that a character who is important in the minds of the audience has greater apparent weight in the picture than a less important character of greater physical stature.

Mere size does, of course, suggest weight, all other things being equal. So does a dark color by comparison with a light one, while at the same time we find that actual illumination weighs more heavily than shadow—at least it seems to demand a place nearer the center of the picture. A vista seems to suggest more weight than a cut-off view, and generally looks better near the center. Movement toward the center appears to outweigh movement away from the center. A group of characters ordinarily outweighs a single character; but this may be reversed when the single character is of great dramatic importance. Generally speaking, when the physical elements are equal, apparent weight is governed by intrinsic interest; hence our traditional custom of giving the dominating character the center of the stage.

The matter of balanced weight in design is psychological rather than physical, and the key to it is to be found in the relative strength of our empathic responses. Herein also lies the reason why balance is so very important æsthetically. We must balance our empathies for the same reason that we must unify them—that is, to avoid actual displeasure. The physical sensation of losing balance is unpleasant, even painful, to all normal people; and a picture that lacks balance makes us feel that sensation empathically.

The nature of the sense of balance itself is somewhat of a mystery. The semicircular canals of the inner ear are supposed to have something to do with it; but however that may be, there is no doubt that it exists as a very real thing, even in early childhood. The fear of falling is one of the earliest fears, and whenever one feels a loss of balance that fear seems to come upon him, even though there is no actual danger. In early childhood the sense of balance is imperfect, or at any rate the muscular response is imperfect; but as one grows older he becomes more sensitive and more skillful through practice, and those who are most sensitive and most skillful develop the keenest and most delicate sense of balance; in most cases they retain it empathically even after age and infirmity have begun to lessen the skill. From the standpoint of æsthetics it is not

necessary to understand the nature of this sense, but it is quite necessary to realize its existence, its relation to pain and pleasure, and its effect upon our empathies.

### PROPORTION

Closely associated with the problem of balance is that of proportion, which involves all questions of quantitative relationship.

The first thing to learn about proportion is that it is everywhere—that all things are relative and therefore proportional. At the same time there is no such thing as an absolute basis of good proportion; even the basis is relative. You may draw a picture of a man and then put a hat on him, raising the question of whether the hat is too large or too small for the man. Or you may draw the hat first, and then draw a man to fit the hat, as a small boy often does. Which method is the better depends upon circumstances; if you are making a poster for the window of a hat store the boy's method may be the more logical one. The safest starting point for any problem in proportion would seem to be that which is most closely associated with the dominant thought or purpose of the work under consideration.

The psychology of proportion is a little more obscure than that of balance, and on one point seems a bit inconsistent with it. Balance implies equality, yet equality is a relatively uninteresting proportion. Balance is a matter of pivoting weights—or apparent weights—on a center, but if we make the center of balance the exact center of measurement, the effect is not entirely pleasing. We do not seem to like an equal division; it may be that our empathic responses in such a case are too evenly balanced, creating an impasse or dilemma which baffles the mind more than it rests the senses. The mind demands unity, and there can be no unity where there is division without subordination (as in *C* and *D*, Fig. 3). The effect is too much like walking a tight rope; the balance is good, but too critical.

In respect to the proportion of length and breadth the same rule seems to hold; a square is generally less interesting than a rectangle, especially when its squareness is emphasized in some way (as by concentric squares in *B*, Fig. 3). The square is a very useful element in combination with others, but as an independent form it has the same baffling quality as the bisected line. One never knows whether it is right side up.

However, mere inequality is not in itself a sign of good proportion. A rectangle 45 by 55 (*E*, Fig. 3) looks a bit "dumpy" by itself, while one 25 by 75 looks too long and narrow (*G*, Fig. 3); though again it must be said that both are useful enough elements in composite design. A

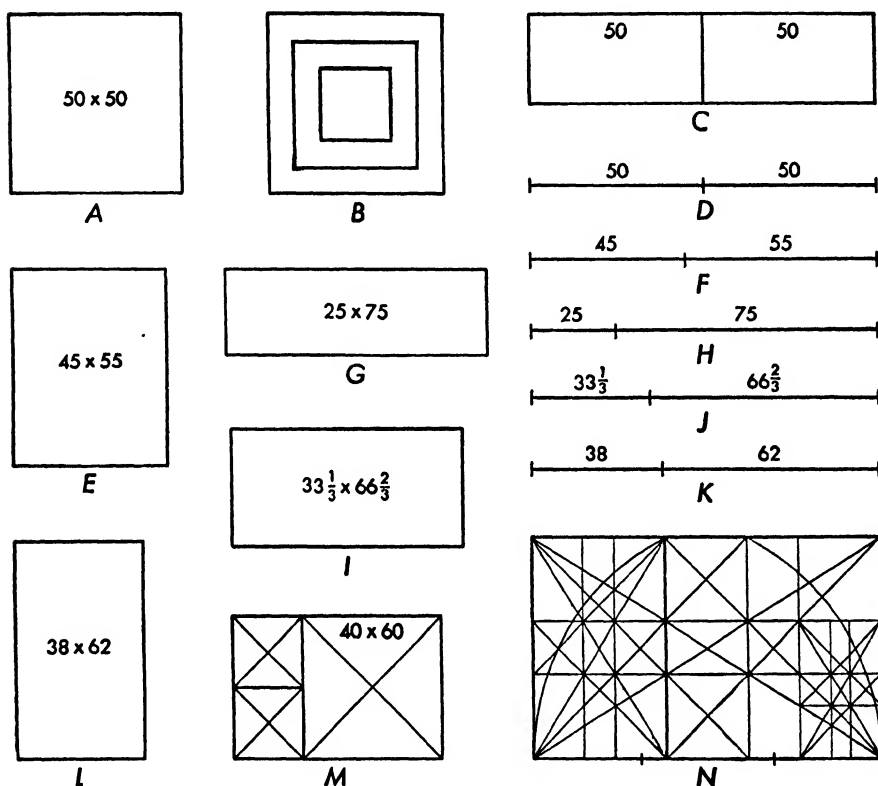


FIG. 3. STUDIES IN PROPORTION.

*M* represents the proportion of the "rhythmic half." *K* is (approximately) the "golden section," and *L* and *N* are golden rectangles. Note the repeated, or rhythmic, relations in the subdivisions of *M* and *N*.

proportion of  $33\frac{1}{3}$  to  $66\frac{2}{3}$ , or 1 to 2, is much better than either of these, and may be contemplated separately without great violence to the æsthetic sense. The rectangle of 1 to 2—a union of two squares—is not particularly interesting (*I*, Fig. 3), but in the division of lengths a proportion of 1 to 2 is moderately pleasing (*J*, Fig. 3).

It is this proportion that divides the length of the rectangle shown at

*M*, the famous rectangle of the "rhythmic half," which some designers consider the most useful, if not the most beautiful, basic form. A square is extended by half a square, so that the length is one and one-half times the breadth; the rectangle thus consists of one large square and two small ones, which seem to echo it rhythmically. There is no doubt that the eye finds this proportion interesting, and the fact that the diametric ratio is simple—2 to 3—makes it easy to use.

But there is one other proportion which for pure abstract beauty has been long regarded as the finest of all: the proportion of the so-called "golden section." It is expressed in the formula,

$$x \text{ is to } y \text{ as } y \text{ is to } (x + y)$$

Mathematically this is a difficult formula to handle, for the relationships involved are not perfectly commensurate, but for all practical purposes in design the ratio may be regarded as that of 38 to 62. The "golden section" is illustrated at *K* in Fig. 3, and the golden rectangle at *L* and *N*. The internal relationships of the golden rectangle are most interesting. Take a square from one end, and you have a smaller golden rectangle left; take a square from that and you have a still smaller rectangle. Draw the diagonals of the squares and rectangles, and you have a perfect deluge of little squares and rectangles, the latter all showing the golden ratio. If there is rhythm in the discovery of the repeated squares in the "rhythmic half" there must be much more in the discovery of all these subtleties of repetition. Whether our appreciation of these forms really is rhythmic would be hard to say. The relationships are all so abstract that one wonders whether the mind can grasp them without conscious effort, and of course it is the unconscious response rather than the conscious that we must consider. Certainly there is general agreement that these two proportions are pleasing.

It must not be thought, however, that all the elements in a composite design should display the golden ratio, or even an approximation of it. That would be monotonous in the extreme. There is plenty of use for the less beautiful forms provided they are worked together harmoniously, counterbalancing each other's faults, and producing a total effect of good proportion. A poorly proportioned actor may fit in with other actors to make a well-proportioned group; or a poorly proportioned group may join with furniture and setting to make a well-proportioned stage

picture. When we hang a long narrow picture over a mantelpiece we do so because that element, badly proportioned in itself, is just what is needed to complete an effect of good proportion for the whole scheme of decoration. The west front of Notre Dame Cathedral shows several long narrow rectangles and several short squatty ones, and the central element is a square enclosing a circle. Yet the proportions of the whole, and the interrelations of the parts, are excellent beyond description.

In the composite art of the theatre there are problems of proportion as between the theme and the plot, the ascending and descending action, the climax and sub-climaxes, the play and its acts, the main character and subordinate characters, the lines and the business, the actors and the setting, the words and the music, the thought and the feeling; and there are problems of internal proportion in most of these elements, including those of visual proportion in the composition of the stage pictures.

The director cannot solve these problems by slide-rule methods. He cannot say for instance that in a play lasting one hundred minutes the main climax should occur at the end of the sixty-second minute; or that the proscenium arch should always measure exactly 38 by 62 feet; or that the performance should consist of three parts words and two parts music. What he can do is to cultivate his own sensibilities in the matter of proportion by first making an intelligent study of the principles involved, and then forming a habit of observing proportions—not only in objects of art but in everything about him. After a time he will find that a bad proportion in any phase of his work will be as painful to him as a “sour” note is to a musician.

### HARMONY

After what has been said about unity and empathy and their relationship, the principle of harmony may be easily understood. Each element in a composition provokes a corresponding empathic response, and in order that these responses may blend agreeably the elements themselves must be in physical harmony.

The laws underlying the principle are those of physics and physiology. Harmony of pitch, in music, for example, is a question of the frequency or rate of vibration of the sound waves. The audible frequencies range from about sixteen cycles per second to several thousand. Each octave in the ascending scale represents a doubling of the frequency. The fre-



quency ratio between a note and its octave is thus one to two, a very simple ratio; every second beat of the higher note coincides with a beat of the lower (*A*, Fig. 4), and the result is a harmonious blending of sound, empathically pleasant. Other combinations of notes, like the first and third or first and fifth, have frequency ratios only a little less simple, and produce almost equally pleasant harmonies. But some notes have

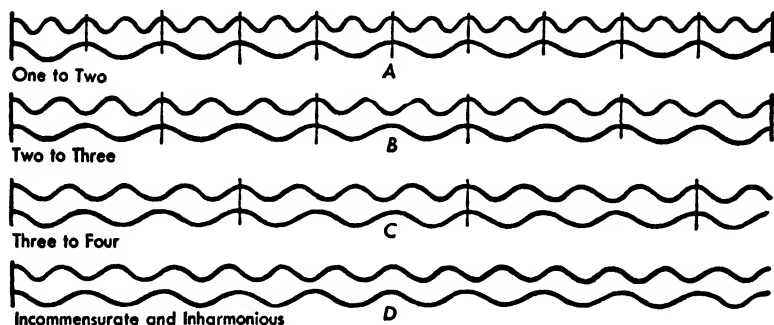


FIG. 4. HARMONIOUS AND INHARMONIOUS FREQUENCIES.

frequencies that do not bear a simple relation to each other, and such notes in combination produce dissonances because the beats almost never coincide (*D*, Fig. 4).

In a similar way the slower rhythms of the tempo in music and dancing show problems of harmony which have a simple mathematical basis. A movement in two-four time, for example, blends readily with one in four-four or common time, while a movement in three-four or waltz time does not. Within reasonable limits we enjoy the effort to harmonize slightly different movements, just as we enjoy the effort of finding unity when it is not too obvious; and it is to give just such pleasure that some composers make use of displaced accent, triplets, grace notes, syncopation, and cadenzas. In general, however, the more easily the rhythms blend the greater the sense of harmony and the more readily we derive empathic enjoyment.

The problem of color harmony is much more abstruse. Differences in color theoretically represent differences in the rate of vibration of light, but as the frequencies of light run to trillions of cycles per second it is hopeless to look for any mathematical basis of empathic effect. Moreover, the visual sensation of color does not seem to bear an absolute re-

lation to the mechanical theory of color, the physiological laws being quite distinct from the physical ones. Theoretically there are vast numbers of pure colors between the lowest red and the highest violet of the visible spectrum, each having its own definite frequency. Actually the normal eye is capable of distinguishing only three primary colors, red, green, and violet, and all color sensation is but a varying combination of these three. It is the physiology of color rather than the physics of the spectrum that the artist needs to know—but of that more in a later chapter (see Chapter XIX).

The point here is that there are underlying laws governing the relationships of all natural elements, and that when these laws clash the empathic effect is essentially unpleasant.

#### GRACE

Herbert Spencer defined graceful motion as "motion that is effected with economy of force." A graceful line, figure, or picture is one that suggests, empathically, a similar economy of force.

Grace does not mean weakness or passivity. A graceful motion may be forceful, swift, and impetuous, if the result achieved is in proportion and there is no sense of futility or waste. It is in the suggestion of misapplied effort, or of effort impeded by hopeless incapacity or unsuitability that we experience a sense of ungracefulness. To feel that a motion is graceful we must feel that there is no easier or pleasanter way of accomplishing the desired result.

Grace is pleasing for the obvious reason that normal human nature dislikes unnecessary effort, or the empathic suggestion thereof. It is not that we are all hopelessly lazy; indeed, most of us enjoy a sense of bodily activity, and gladly expend energy in a good cause. But we do not like to waste it in mere friction, and we do not like the baffling sense of futility when the results seem inadequate in proportion to the effort expended. We like to get the largest and freest sense of action from the least possible effort. This undoubtedly accounts—at least partially—for the great popularity of such sports as skating, tobogganing, and motoring. It also accounts for the fact that we prefer a smooth, sweet-running eight-cylinder car to a rattling wheezy "jalopy." We feel the labor and strain of the latter in our bodily responses, and the sensation is distressing. The man who regularly drives his own car becomes extraordinarily sensitive to the

slightest change or irregularity in its rhythms, and suffers bodily distress at any indication of loss of power. Objects in nature affect us in the same way. It is pleasant to watch the seemingly effortless flight of a sea gull, soaring into the wind on motionless wings; but a waddling duck is not so pleasing an object, especially to a fat man. The mere sight of a dachshund is painful—or would be but for the saving relief of humor. From the standpoint of unsatisfying effort nothing, probably, is more distressing than the sensation we sometimes experience in a dream when our feet seem weighted with lead, and the slightest movement seems to require almost superhuman effort.

When we empathize in the suggested movement of a picture or statue, or the real movement of a character on the stage, we normally prefer that movement to be graceful—that is, easy and economical of effort. There are exceptions, of course—movements and situations in which the meaning demands awkwardness. But gratuitous awkwardness we resent, because we cannot help feeling it in ourselves. I have mentioned the effect when one actor has to carry another and seems to have great difficulty in doing so. Similarly when an actor stands or moves awkwardly, or when the setting displays ungraceful lines, we are bound to feel uncomfortable because our induced motor patterns are ungraceful.

But what lines are, as a matter of fact, ungraceful? What classes of lines suggest economy of force, and what classes do not?

Offhand one might suppose that a straight line, being the shortest distance between two points, would represent the greatest possible economy of force in motion, and consequently the finest grace. This, however, is not the case. What is gained by economy in distance is more than lost by the sense of effort in keeping the line straight. If one tries to walk a chalk line for fifty or a hundred feet he is quite conscious of the effort required, and if he tries to draw a straight line on paper he finds it much more difficult than to draw certain types of curves. The effort suggested by the straight line is the effort of self-conscious rigidity, of intentional resistance to contending forces, of artificial and precarious balance. This does not mean that the straight line is never useful in design, but it does mean that its usefulness is generally to be found in the achievement of effects other than grace.

So for the perfect circle. It is useful, but not primarily graceful, at least with respect to the motion that it suggests. An arc of a circle is,

like a straight line, artificially regular and self-conscious; its motion is maintained against the insistent pull of centrifugal force, and therefore implies considerable effort. The circle is most pleasing when used whole, with the emphasis upon its unity and centrality; it is least pleasing when the eye is led around its circumference.

Somewhat more grace may be found in the other conic section curves:



FIG. 5. STUDIES IN GRACE OF LINE.

Conic section curves: *A*, circle; *B*, ellipse; *C*, parabola; *D*, hyperbola. Higher degree curves: *E*, spiral of Archimedes; *F*, reciprocal, or hyperbolic, spiral; *G*, lituus; *H*, logarithmic spiral; *J*, catenary curve. Double curves: *K*, two circular arcs; *L*, a lituus and a spiral of Archimedes; *M*, an arithmetic spiral and a lituus.

ellipse, parabola, and hyperbola (*B*, *C*, *D*, Fig. 5). They are not all perfectly graceful, especially if considered in their entirety, but they do show some variation of curvature at different points and a portion of one side taken near the focus is sometimes fairly pleasing.

Still more graceful curves are to be found among the so-called "higher plane" curves—that is, curves whose mathematical formulas involve trigonometric functions or coefficients higher than the square. Most of the spirals belong to this class (*E*, *F*, *G*, *H*, Fig. 5). Another curve, by some artists considered the most graceful of all, is the catenary curve, or festoon curve—the curve made by a perfectly flexible cable or chain supported at two points (*J*, Fig. 5). This is often seen nowadays, slightly modified for engineering reasons, in suspension bridges, and is, of course, very common in draperies and decorations.

The trouble with straight lines and circles is that they imply a perfect balance of forces not often found in nature. Natural forces are unequal, and the confluence of unequal forces results in curves of more varied type and more complex formula. Such curves are more graceful for the very reason that they seem more natural, less studied, less suggestive of conscious effort. It is precisely because the catenary curve is the natural position of flexible draperies that it suggests absence of effort.

Those so far mentioned are all single curves, but with other things equal a double curve is ordinarily more graceful and more interesting than a single one. Its superior grace is doubtless due to the compensating effect suggested; the centrifugal force developed in the first part is absorbed or balanced by the opposite force in the second part. Even in double curves, however, an exact equality between the two parts is not pleasant; we prefer curves in which we can discern no studied ratio. It is economy of mental as well as physical effort that constitutes grace.

Perhaps that will do to suggest the principle. The application of this and other principles of design in the art of the theatre is obvious enough in a general way if one remembers the strength of empathic effects in the theatre; and of course it is obvious in relation to scenic art. No stage director can possibly know too much of the principles of design, or have his tastes and sensibilities too highly trained.



## *Preparation of the Play*

WE TURN now to the more practical problems of play production; and for the sake of order and completeness I shall begin with some elementary matters that will seem to have little relation to the artistic principles so far discussed. The usefulness of the latter will, however, become gradually clearer as we proceed.

Most books on play production for amateurs devote considerable space to the problem of choosing a play, but this is so largely a matter of local conditions that no specific recipe appears to be very helpful. The professional producer chooses a play that he thinks will bring in a large profit; the amateur chooses one that he thinks is within the capabilities of his actors and his equipment, and that promises to please the particular audience to which he must appeal.

In the latter respect the amateur producer sometimes runs unwisely to extremes. When the audience is a popular one, not especially intellectual, he selects entertaining comedies and farces, and for a time all goes well. The audience enjoys an occasional evening of harmless laughter and the players have a good time. But neither the players nor the audience enjoy very much intellectual or artistic growth; the work of staging and rehearsing seems more and more futile and irksome, the older members grow tired of doing all the hard work, and withdraw; very young people take their places, and the dramatic purpose gradually gives way to a social one. When, on the other hand, the audience is a bit "arty," the producer is apt to select more or less unpleasant plays of the ultra-realistic or psychopathic type, with the result that after a time the company degenerates into a class in abnormal psychology, and the audience dwindles until only the neurotics remain.

As a matter of general policy it would seem best to choose plays sufficiently varied in their appeal to keep the interest of the normal human animal, but at the same time sufficiently good in a literary and artistic

way to make the work spent on them worth while. The real test of a play is its effect upon the players. If they grow to like it better and better as they work with it—to see new meaning, new humor, new beauty in each repetition, even after five or six public performances—the play is a good play, and is worth doing, both for its own sake and for its influence on the morale of the organization. But if after a half dozen rehearsals it seems to grow wearisome—if the sentiments begin to seem tawdry and the jokes stale—one may suspect that it is not really a good play; and even if it seems to entertain the audience the long-range result will be bad. Professional actors can be hired to purvey trash for the entertainment of the customers; but an amateur group can thrive only when the actors enjoy their work enough to share their enjoyment with the audience, and to want to go on with it.

#### THE ONE-ACT PLAY

It is a matter of frequent dispute whether an amateur organization should give much of its time to the production of one-act plays rather than plays of full length. It is sometimes contended that the one-act plays available for amateur production are more numerous, more varied, more fanciful, and generally more original than the longer plays equally available; that they are simpler to produce, offer a better distribution of parts, and require fewer rehearsals. Certainly, they are cheaper. Few carry a royalty higher than \$10 a performance, many are to be had at \$5, and some are free of royalty; whereas modern plays of three or four acts at all comparable in literary merit are held at \$25 to \$50 a performance. These are all good arguments for the use of the one-act play, and because of them the one-act play is still popular with amateurs, especially with those worthy groups who are trying to raise the artistic and literary standards of the drama.

But the one-act play has certain serious limitations, one of which is that the modern audience unquestionably prefers the unity of the longer play. This has been demonstrated again and again. With the same group of players, the same direction, and the same potential audience, the bill of one-act plays draws a small attendance and the full-length play a large one. Quite apart from the financial advantage, it is clearly better for the players and for the organization to have the largest and most eager audiences possible. Another limitation is that the great majority of

modern one-act plays, though high in artistic aim, are amateurish in execution; they are, as a matter of fact, largely the work of amateur dramatists. To conceal this quality in the production requires the most expert direction and the highest skill of the experienced actor, especially in the reading of the lines. It is the ambition of most amateurs to approach a professional standard of ease and smoothness, but their best chance of doing so is to start with a play that is not in itself amateurish, and the one-act play seldom gives them this opportunity. Finally, the one-act play is not nearly so good a training school for the actor as is generally supposed. It is true that three or four one-act plays offer more leading parts than one long play, but on the other hand the one-act play is much less exacting in its demands for teamwork—the most important and the most difficult part of acting—and it is generally episodic in structure with very little suggestion of growth or development. One may learn to play isolated scenes and do character bits, to portray single traits or moods, and still have no conception of the larger problems involved in acting—problems of emphasis, balance, proportion, development, and coordination. On the whole, the earnest amateur will learn more by playing a small part in a long play, under good direction and in company with more experienced players, than he could learn by playing more important parts in several one-act plays.

As to the choice of particular plays there is little to be said. It is altogether a matter of what is wanted and what is available. In the bibliographical appendix of this book will be found some suggestions as to where to look for the best lists of plays; no actual lists are included for the reason that their usefulness would be merely temporary.

The matter of royalties is a serious one for amateurs. Authors cannot be blamed for wanting to be paid for their labors, and amateurs should regard the payment of royalty, when due, as their first obligation. But the prevailing royalty rates for good modern plays are undoubtedly too high and too rigid, and amateur groups in very small theatres cannot afford to pay them. They must either forego the use of desirable plays, or steal them; and many, unfortunately, are dishonest enough to do the latter. Authors and agents take the position that good plays are valuable property and should not be rented for production at a low price; but the actual effect of high flat royalties is injury to the authors' interests. Honest, responsible amateurs in the little theatres, who would gladly



pay a modest royalty for a good play, refrain from using that play if the royalty is too high; while the dishonest ones give it surreptitiously, often under a false title, and without crediting the author.

The system of flat royalties is all wrong. Fifty dollars is not an excessive royalty for a recent popular success when it is to be given to an audience of a thousand people at \$1.00 a ticket; but when a little theatre group is playing to an audience of ninety-nine people—or even twice that number—at a subscription rate of fifty or sixty cents each, a \$50 royalty is prohibitive. The willingness of many authors and a few agents to reduce royalties in a good cause does not solve the problem; it puts the whole thing on a charity basis, and favors those whose lack of self-respect will permit them to beg for special consideration. Several attempts have been made by the National Theatre Conference and other little-theatre organizations to secure a better working agreement with authors and publishers, but with little real or lasting progress. The only system that ever will be, or can be, equitable, is an honest percentage system.

#### STUDYING THE PLAY

It would seem natural after selecting a play—if not before—to study it carefully in order to discover the author's aim and purpose. Yet many directors, amateur and professional, are content to omit this step and to plunge right into rehearsals with the idea of learning the play in the process. In a professional production the skill of the actors and their ability to cooperate quickly with the last-minute inspirations of the director sometimes save him from the consequence of this procedure; but the amateur director can count upon no such luck. If there is one supreme shortcoming of the inexperienced actor it is his inability to unlearn something which he has once learned wrong; and if rehearsals are begun before the director knows what he is about, some things certainly will be learned wrong and will have to be unlearned. Moreover it is well to remember that the director who shows a thorough knowledge of the play at the first rehearsal commands the respect of his actors and gets better work out of them.

The wise director will therefore seek first to know the play, to understand its construction, its plot, theme, and characters, and to grasp the full significance of the author's message.

In construction, every play is basically a conflict between two main

forces, one of which is more universal, abstract, and extensive than the other. The fortunes of the protagonist, his aims, ambitions, and desires, ordinarily constitute the more particular force; while the more universal consists of the law of God or man, the doctrine of chance, the established conventions, prejudices, and inhibitions of society, or the larger influences of heredity or environment. Another way of saying the same thing is to say that every play represents the struggle of a protagonist against forces greater than himself—or, as some put it, against Fate.

A play in which the protagonist, or "hero," triumphs over the universal forces is technically a comedy, and one in which he is defeated by the universal forces is technically a tragedy. These designations do not always correspond, of course, to the popular ones, or the ones stated in the playbills. Most of Barrie's plays, for example, are known and billed as comedies, but are in reality tragedies in that the characters fail to rise above their obstacles. Some of the broadest farces are technically tragedies for the same reason. On the other hand many of the most intense dramas, like *The Merchant of Venice*, or *Seventh Heaven*, or *The Thirteenth Chair*, are technically comedies, because they end triumphantly, with the obstacles overcome.

If a director is to produce a play intelligently he must know the nature of the conflict involved; he must know which is the universal and which the particular force, and whether the play is a comedy or tragedy. He must know what subordinate plots or counter-plots there are, and what relation they bear to the main plot. He must know the nature and position of the climax—the high point of action, the point at which the main plot turns and begins to resolve itself in the final direction. Without such knowledge he cannot hope to work up the proper dramatic foreshadowing, to point up the important scenes, and to maintain the proper balance and proportion.

But plot is not all. In nearly every play there is also a theme, an abstract idea of some sort, often more important than the plot. It is generally the theme, rather than the plot, that determines the spirit of the play and the mood in which it is to be played. In a satirical play, for example, the plot may be quite serious, and a group of actors who grasp the plot but miss the theme may perform the play as a romantic comedy or heroic tragedy, failing completely to carry the point. In Shaw's *Saint Joan* the plot is the tragic story of the life and death of Joan of Arc, but

the theme is the cynically humorous one that although the saints are good souls who mean well, they are hard to get along with in real life, and are much to be preferred in the dead and canonized state. In *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* the plots are concerned with murder and its avenging, but the theme in the first is the progressive entanglement of ambition, and in the second, the weakening effect of indecision and procrastination. The whole flavor of any play depends upon the director's recognition of the theme.

One can always find the plot—if there is one—by reading the play, but the theme and spirit and mood are sometimes so subtle and elusive that they can be sensed only after considerable study. A knowledge of the author and of his other work is here very helpful; likewise a knowledge of dramatic history and the kinds and types of plays current in each period. When it is possible for the director to confer with the living author the advantage gained is great. The ideal situation is of course that in which the director is himself the author. In the latter case he will not only be familiar with the text of the play, but will—presumably—know the author's intention throughout, and will have visualized the scenes and characters in his imagination. When the director is not the author his first step is to put himself imaginatively in the author's place.

The question of whether the director has the right to consider himself the author and to change or falsify the author's meaning is interesting, but it is a moral or legal question rather than an artistic one, and so a little out of our province. It is well within our province, however, to consider how he may best modify, or alter, or adapt the written text in order to convey the author's message with the greatest artistic fidelity.

#### EDITING THE TEXT

When a new play is staged under the direction of the author, or in consultation with him, it ordinarily undergoes considerable last-minute alteration. Only a very egotistical author regards his text as final and inviolable, or supposes himself infallible in the matter of foresight. In the case of an older play, however, many directors consider the text too sacred for alteration. With respect to plays of high literary or poetic merit there is some justification for this feeling; yet it is almost inconceivable that any play could be revived after a lapse of time and played by a different company, in a different theatre, with different costumes,

settings, and properties, and to an audience of different training and environment, without at least some modification of text. It may well be that the greatest service the director can render the author is to adapt the text to the new situation in such a way that the message of the play may not be lost.

This does not necessarily mean a great deal of rewriting or addition to the text—the dangers of which are fairly obvious. It means, as a rule, intelligent cutting, judicious rearrangement of scenes, excision or alteration of passages that may have lost their original meaning through changes in language or through loss of allusive reference; alteration of phraseology to meet the unavoidable limitations of the actors; and modification of the action as necessitated by limitations of equipment.

The recognition and acceptance of limitations are among the director's first concerns, and their importance from an æsthetic point of view has already been emphasized. When the limitations are such as to make adequate production of a given play impossible, the only honest procedure is to choose another play. When they are such as not to interfere with the main thought of the play it is far better not to struggle uselessly against them, but to accept them frankly and adapt the play to fit them.

For example, if the text calls for hearty laughter on the part of the heroine, and the leading lady, otherwise satisfactory, is unable to laugh convincingly on the stage, the question then arises: Is the laughter essential to the thought of the play? If so, there are only two possible solutions, a new leading lady or a new play. If not, why ruin the play by an unconvincing laugh? Would it not be better to revise the text, eliminating the laugh?

Or suppose that the text specifies a practical staircase for entrances and exits in full view of the audience, and the limitations of the stage make such a thing impossible. Again the question: Is it essential to the meaning of the play? If so—another play, or another theatre. If not, the best plan is to do without the staircase and alter the text to suit. It is generally more satisfactory to eliminate the impracticable feature entirely, even at the cost of considerable change in the text, than to adopt a pretentious compromise. One group that I knew of went to a great deal of trouble to solve just such a staircase problem on a very restricted stage by having an archway built out from the wall, with one or two steps leading up into it and a platform on which the actor might stand con-

cealed after having supposedly gone up stairs. But the members of the audience—all regular subscribers—knew that there was a solid wall behind that archway and that the actor must be hiding just out of sight, and their attention was distracted accordingly; they were busy watching to catch a glimpse of his elbow or coat-tails instead of paying attention to the play. It would have been possible to have used an ordinary exit, right or left, with an imaginary stairway off stage, and to have suggested it by a line in the text and by having the actor look upwards at the proper angle when making his exit. The simpler solution will almost invariably prove the better, for the very good reason that the imagination requires only a little assistance in a creative way, whereas it is very easily distracted by any sort of unnecessary complication.

The amateur director has, of course, a great many more limitations to contend with than the professional. The latter usually works in a regular theatre with standard equipment, and almost anything called for in the text can be supplied in some fashion. In reviving an old play he can use the stage directions of the original production, placing entrances and exits as called for in the text, and depending upon the designer, stage manager, and stage crew to reproduce the original effects with reasonable accuracy. He cannot always choose an ideal cast, especially in stock-company work, but at least he can rely upon some experience and adaptability on the part of his actors, and he can expect steady attendance at rehearsals and earnest work. The amateur director, on the other hand, must often put up with the most distressing obstacles in limitation of stage space and equipment, in lack of time and assistance, in paucity of financial resources, and in the inexperience of his actors. Under these circumstances he will more often find himself under the necessity of modifying the text.

It would be impossible to catalogue all the types of alteration and modification that are most apt to prove necessary, but the mention of one or two of the most common may suggest the sort of thing a trained director must be prepared to do.

#### CUTTING

The most common of all is, of course, cutting. Many long plays, especially five-act plays, are, in the original text, too long for modern

production, especially by amateurs, and must be considerably abridged. Even a modern comedy arranged for professional production in two hours and a half will often require further cutting when produced by amateurs, partly because the waits are apt to be longer, and partly because the amateurs are apt to be slower in getting through the dialogue. Accurate timing of a play cannot, of course, be done until rehearsals are going smoothly, but the intelligent director can do the bulk of the necessary cutting in advance if he gives his mind to it, and in so doing he can combine cutting for length with abridgment for clarity and consistency.

Most amateur directors, and a good many professional ones, put altogether too much confidence in the so-called standard "acting editions," especially of Shakespeare's plays. Many of these represent stage precedent dating back to the eighteenth century—a period when Shakespeare was generally misunderstood and misinterpreted—and in some instances they represent very radical revisions of Shakespeare by eighteenth-century authors determined to make him conform to the spirit of their own time. Even the best acting editions are, as a rule, taken from the prompt books of eminent actors who made their cuttings primarily for the display of their own talents rather than for the unity of the play.

The modern director, amateur or professional, should make his own acting edition. In the case of Shakespeare he should start with a good standard edition based on the First Folio of 1623. If he wishes to do a really thorough job he should study and analyze the text with the aid of the Variorum Shakespeare (edited by Horace Howard Furness and others). By cutting out the portions least helpful in conveying the meaning to his particular audience, and by rearranging and adapting the remainder, he will get something more honest and more effective than he could get by following the prompt book of Garrick or Forrest or Booth—based originally, perhaps, on a revision by Colley Cibber.

In the preparation of an English play for production in America it must be borne in mind that there are some language differences; that some words and phrases which are merely commonplace in England are unintelligible or misleading to an American audience. Where such elements are necessary to the English flavor, and the English flavor is necessary to the play, they should of course be left in, even at the expense of a footnote in the program explaining them. Where the play is more

universal and not essentially English, it will often be found that an omission or substitution can be made with a gain in clearness and without loss of truth or spirit.

In the same way obscurities of meaning caused by lapse of time are best ironed out, unless there is some definite gain in archaic flavor to be had by leaving them in. A play twenty or twenty-five years old is not generally old enough to be worth treating as archaic; costumes, settings, properties, and dialogue may best be brought up to date, and the time specified as "the present." But a play seventy-five or one hundred years old is usually beyond this process, and so better played in the spirit of its time. Even in the latter case there will be some passages in the text that because of obsolete words or lost allusions will do more to destroy clearness than to bear out the archaic flavor. The author intended them to be clear; if they are not, it may be falsifying his meaning more to leave them as they are than to change them.

But the most troublesome modifications of text are those made necessary by the limitations of the actors. For example, many dramatists make a habit of leaving lines of dialogue unfinished for the sake of naturalness, allowing the characters to interrupt each other as people do in real life. Professional actors are sometimes able to carry this out in a natural way, but inexperienced amateurs have great difficulty with it; either they interrupt too soon, destroying the meaning, or they interrupt too late, leaving an awkward pause. What is worse, the actor who is to be interrupted anticipates it in his tone, and stops with a suggestive coaxing inflection as if to say, "Come on now, interrupt me; that's the end of my line." In another chapter I shall try to suggest ways of correcting these tendencies when the meaning requires that the broken dialogue be retained. But when it does not, the director will often find it expedient to complete or curtail the interrupted lines, and to rely upon other means of achieving naturalness. There is no use in retaining a device which the author intended for naturalness if the effect with a particular actor is greater *unnaturalness*.

The language of many plays is literary rather than conversational, and only actors of some ability and experience can deliver such language convincingly and without artificiality. When the play is of high literary merit it may be better to put up with the artificiality for the sake of the

beauty; but when the only effect of the artificiality is stiltedness—as in the case of many nineteenth-century plays—and when the actors are inexperienced, a certain amount of rewriting for naturalness is advisable. An actor who cannot say “The carriage waits” without appearing a “stick” may be able to say “The carriage is waiting, sir,” with reasonable naturalness.

In the preparation of the text the director should always make sure that his scholarship is equal to the task, and that he is not merely working upon ignorance and guesswork. If he feels the need of revision and is not competent to do it himself he should seek the help of some one who is.

#### THE PROMPT BOOK

All cuts and revisions should be carefully marked in the prompt book and in the individual parts to be given the actors, and care should be taken to see that all subsequent corrections are entered in both places.

If the play is in printed form and on small pages, the best way to prepare the prompt book is to cut up two copies and paste the pages in a strongly bound blankbook, large enough to provide wide margins, so that all corrections, stage directions, calls, and warnings can be clearly entered. If the play is typewritten it will usually have plenty of marginal space for this purpose. If it is rented and must be returned without disfiguration it may be interleaved with blank sheets clipped to the pages, and the notes entered on these.

It is an evident advantage for the director to have his prompt copy ready for annotation when he begins his study of the play, so that he can enter all his notes and comments as he goes. This sometimes results in so much marking up that a new and simpler copy has to be prepared for the prompter to use at actual performances; but aside from the cost of the additional copy this is not a disadvantage. However, it can be avoided if all notations concerning movements, positions, changes of text, tempo, interpretation, and the like, are confined to the inside and bottom margins, leaving the top and outside margins free for notations that concern the prompter—warnings and cues for light changes, curtains, music, sound effects, telephone bells, doorbells, and so on; also calls for the actors if these are to be used. My own practice is to enter all prompter’s



cues in red on the outside margin, all call-boy cues in blue at the tops of the pages, and all director's notes in pencil (to facilitate erasures and changes) on the inner and bottom margins.

It is also good practice to paste into the spare pages of the prompt book carbon copies of the rehearsal schedule, the scene plot, light plot, property plot, and any other plot needed for the particular play; also any program notes, publicity releases, photographs, or other incidental material that might be useful, and would possibly otherwise be mislaid.

#### PLANNING THE SETTINGS

Having mastered the play and made the necessary cuts the director can set about planning the settings. The actual designing of settings to complete the beauty of the production is a special problem, and will be more appropriately considered in a later chapter. Moreover, it is often delegated to some one other than the director. But it is the director's own work to determine how many settings are needed, what their general arrangement is to be, what the dominating note of each is to be in order to establish the mood of the scene, and how the entrances and exits are to be placed—the latter being a very important advance consideration.

There are three different ways in which the problem of setting may present itself to the director. It may be a question of how to design a new setting appropriate and adequate to the play. Or it may be a question of how to modify and rearrange a stock setting so as to approximate the arrangement called for in the text. Or—and with most amateur directors this is the usual experience—it may be a question of how to make shift with the only setting available, regardless of its unsuitability. Many a professional director who could solve the first problem easily would find his ingenuity seriously taxed by the last.

#### ENTRANCES AND EXITS

Insofar as there is any option in the matter, the director should exercise the greatest care in the placing of entrances and exits, for they have much to do with the effectiveness of stage pictures and bits of action. What might be called the stock arrangement for interior settings provides three entrances, right, left, and center (*A*, Fig. 6), the center door being often a double one or a large open doorway. The constant repetition of this same arrangement in a succession of plays is a bit monoto-

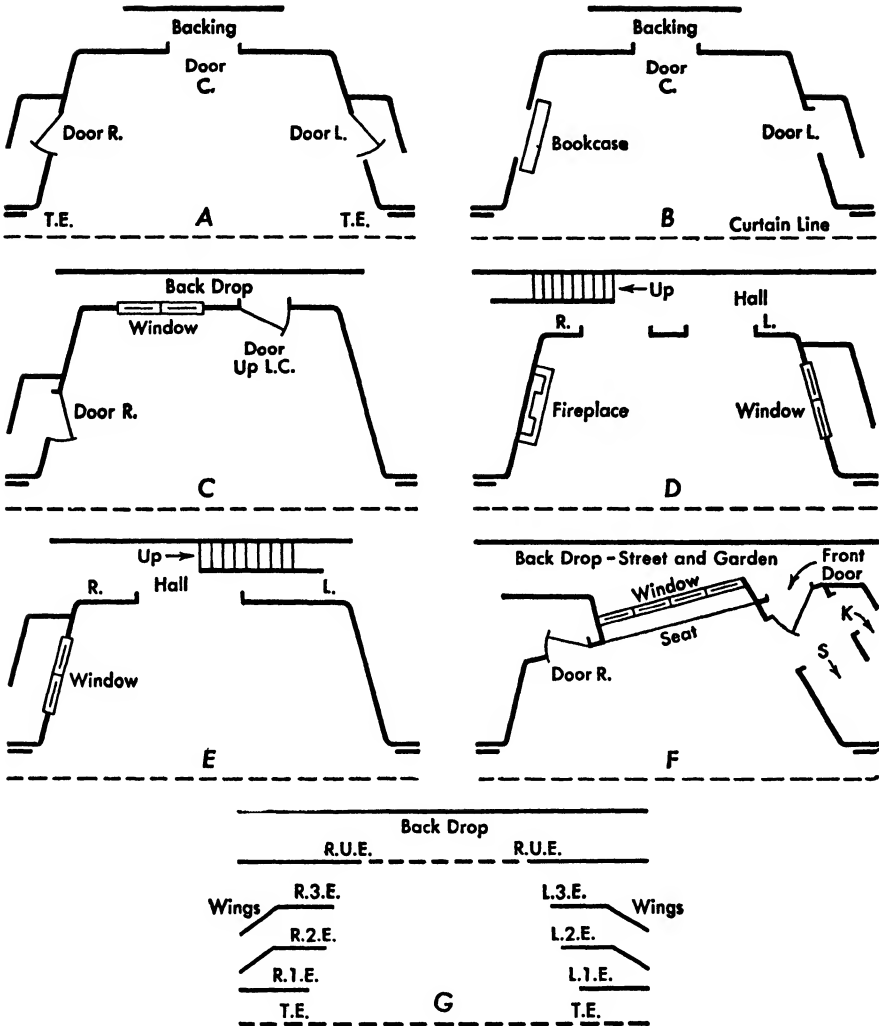


FIG. 6. ARRANGEMENTS OF ENTRANCES AND EXITS.

A, B, and C are common arrangements in cottage interiors. D and E suggest city houses, and F a suburban house. G is the conventional wing-and-drop exterior setting, with old-fashioned numbered entrances.

nous, yet the plan is a good one, flexible, and adaptable to almost any play. It is certainly better to use the stock entrances than to be obliged to do without them when they are needed. One of the worst possible handicaps in the arrangement of stage pictures and movements is to be denied the use of an entrance where one ought to be placed for best effect.

In general the following suggestions will be found helpful in the planning of entrances and exits:

1. Have enough of them to account for all comings and goings and to tell the story intelligibly.

2. Do not have more than are needed. An unused exit, visible to the audience, is a source of constant distraction; people are busy wondering where it leads to or who is to come in by it when they should be paying attention to the play. If a stock set is used having an extra door not needed in the play it is better to make a window of it, or an alcove, or to conceal it with draperies or a piece of furniture (*B*, Fig. 6). The number of exits should be as small as is consistent with clarity and convincingness. Ordinarily two or three will be enough; some plays, especially farces and melodramas, require more.

3. Let each exit mean some particular place mentioned or implied in the text, and then see to it that it is always used by an actor supposed to be going to that place, or coming from it. Audiences are very quick to notice a discrepancy in this. It is sometimes possible, of course, to use one exit as indicating several places. For example, an upstairs sitting room may have only one doorway leading to the hall, used alike by persons going to another room or to the street. An open doorway may be made to suggest two exits, one right and the other left, according to which way the actor turns. In the setting shown at *D*, Fig. 6, two archways give on a hall; the street door is imagined in the hall off stage left, and the rest of the house off right. At *E*, Fig. 6, there is just one wide doorway to the room itself, but it shows three exits: a street exit off right, a back hall off left, and a stairway leading up. Such an arrangement was used with great effectiveness and apparent variety in the record-breaking *Life With Father*.

4. Let the arrangement be a conceivable one, possible in a real house—not necessarily an exact imitation of reality built to scale, but something bearing at least a slight resemblance to the arrangements familiar in real life, so that the audience is not unduly puzzled and distracted. The settings shown at *A* and *B*, in Fig. 6, are possible, though not particularly suggestive of reality. That at *C* is sufficiently convincing as suggesting a small cottage. Those at *D* and *E* suggest real city houses, and have been effectively used in many plays. The setting at *F*, representing a country house, is an elaborate attempt to be convincing; it shows a hall-

way and front door at stage left, with an exit to the kitchen at *κ*, seen by only a small part of the audience, and one to the stairway at *σ*, invisible to the audience, but suggested by the actor standing in the doorway and looking up; the situation is somewhat clarified by a broad window showing the outdoor approach through a front garden. The arrangement is fairly successful as suggesting a real house, but it is very one-sided, and would tend to throw the action too constantly to the left; and in a feeble attempt to correct this the designer has added a most unconvincing door at the right, the effect of which is to puzzle the audience as to the construction of the house, and so distract them. After all, the problem is not so much how to create a positive illusion of reality as how to avoid destroying illusion by distracting attention. The trouble with a setting which is too unusual is that it does just that.

5. Let the entrances be so placed as to be easily seen by all the members of the audience. Nothing is more annoying to the spectator than an arrangement like that at *A*, Fig. 7, which represents the stage of a certain clubhouse. The walls are solid and immovable, and the proscenium arch is narrower than the stage itself, so that the right door is always invisible to nearly half the audience, and the left door to the other half. Every actor entering right or left must walk about six feet in view of some of the audience before he is visible to all of them; and whenever during the action he goes near either side of the stage some of the audience are left in doubt as to whether he has gone off or not. In arranging entrances and exits the director should have in mind the shape of the auditorium as well as that of the stage, and should take pity on those who are unfortunate enough to occupy the side seats.

6. Let some of the entrances be placed down stage. This is especially important in a long act with much coming and going, and on a deep or narrow stage; it is less important on a wide, shallow stage. An arrangement like that at *B*, Fig. 7, representing another stupidly designed clubhouse, grows fearfully monotonous after a time. If the action is to be kept down stage each entering character must walk straight toward the audience before he seems to be part of the play, and straight away from it before making his exit. The result of such an arrangement is either an arbitrary awkwardness, or an irresistible tendency for the actors to hang back up stage. In a formal play the artificial parade to the footlights is sometimes acceptable, especially if it is made a frank convention

throughout; but in a realistic modern comedy it is destructive of illusion. Only the most skillful director can arrange natural stage movements for such a setting.

7. Let the doors be hung to swing down stage, as at *A* and *C*, Fig. 6. The arrangement at *A*, with the doors swinging down stage and opening off stage, is the usual one; but that at *C* is fairly common, and is very

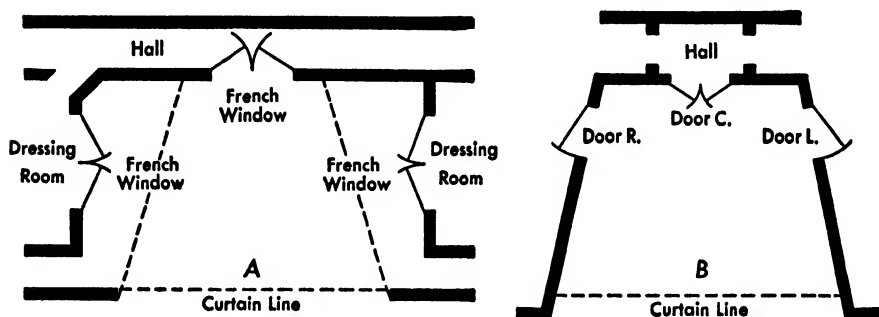


FIG. 7. TYPICAL CLUBHOUSE STAGES.

useful when a character is to peep in and be seen doing so. Only very exceptional circumstances would justify a door placed to swing up stage, for the fairly obvious reason that the movement of an actor entering or leaving by such a door would almost inevitably be clumsy.<sup>1</sup>

8. Avoid the use of the so-called "tormentor entrances," i.e., the spaces between the proscenium arch and the "tormentors," or false proscenium, as at T.E. in *A*, or *G*, Fig. 6. Usually they are not wide enough, but even if they are the audience does not naturally think of them as doorways; the tormentors are part of the frame whose purpose is the maintenance of æsthetic distance, and the use of the spaces in front of them for entrance or exit is destructive of illusion.

9. In exterior scenes with wing settings, as at *G* in Fig. 6, avoid indiscriminate use of the entrances and exits between the wings. Establish the meaning of each exit used, and stick to that exit for that meaning. If it seems confusing to leave some of them constantly unused it may be possible to block them up from the stage by means of set pieces—trees, rocks, benches, bushes, or fences, or perhaps projecting bits of

<sup>1</sup> In nearly forty years of stage directing I have had occasion to use this arrangement only once—for the cellar door in *You Can't Take It With You*, to let the glare of exploding fireworks light the face of the detective who opens the door, and at the same time to conceal the mechanics of the fireworks effect from the audience.

buildings. Never block up an entrance off stage, however, when it looks open as seen from the stage. To do so is to invite some nervous or forgetful actor into a most embarrassing trap.

10. Let the most important entrances—those that are to figure most vividly in the essential action of the play—be so placed as to catch the eye easily; and if possible have them so designed as to create a sense of expectation. When an actor enters through an inconspicuous doorway the effect is one of surprise; when he enters through a conspicuous or seemingly significant doorway it is rather one of inevitability satisfied. Usually the latter is the more desirable effect.

#### WINDOWS

The placing of windows may be part of the problem in design and decoration, or it may be a matter of the essential action of the play. When the dramatist requires a character to look in or out of a window, open or close one, speak or signal from one, or when there is some significance in the light coming through a window or in the view seen through it, the placing of that window is just as fundamental to the action of the play as the placing of entrances and exits.

A window through which the audience is expected to see something should normally be placed up stage, either in the rear flat or in a sharply slanting wall, and not in a side wall visible to only half of the audience. A large window is best for this purpose, so that the backing to be seen by the audience can be placed at a reasonable distance behind the window and still be visible in all parts of the house. If the view is to include anything supposed to be below the level of the stage the window must be set low; otherwise the people down front will be too conscious of looking up hill and seeing down hill.

When a character on the stage is to look out of a window and to show some important reaction to what he sees outside, and it is not necessary for the audience to see for itself, the window is best placed in the side wall, fairly well down stage. This enables the actor, as he looks out of the window, to show at least his profile, and perhaps a three-quarter view of his face.

Important entrances can often be pointed up very effectively by the judicious placing of windows. A character seen passing a window before he enters takes on a heightened interest and makes as deep an impres-

sion on the audience as if he had paused in tableau; at the same time there is no suspension of the action of the play, and no sense of self-conscious artificiality. The device is so good that it has been somewhat overworked by professional producers; but even this has not destroyed its usefulness. Sometimes the dramatist prescribes it; Barrie, for instance, makes skillful use of it in his charming little semi-pantomime, *Pantaloon*.

When a window figures significantly in the action the whole setting must be designed about that window. It is just as important as any entrance or exit. Conversely, it must not be forgotten that a window is a natural point of interest, so that the placing of one in a too conspicuous position when it has little or no real significance in the play is sure to cause more or less distraction.

#### LIGHTING

Since the advent of electricity, stage lighting has come to be an important part of scenic art. As a problem in design and in mechanics there will be more to say of it later. But even in the rough planning of his settings the director must take into consideration the major sources of light and their relation to the action of the play. Without knowing the sources from which the light is to come he cannot know which are the conspicuous places on the stage, and how his groups are to be placed for emphasis.

In interior scenes representing daytime the windows are thought of as the natural sources of light, and whenever possible the audience should be allowed to feel that the light actually comes from them. Of course it is very seldom that a stage can be adequately lighted from this source alone; something must be sacrificed to keep the actors' faces out of constant shadow. A little gentle assistance may be had from the footlights and borders, from balcony or beam lights, and perhaps from a concealed floodlight or two. So long as this extra light is not obtrusive no harm is done; but it is singularly disturbing to watch a midday scene indoors when it is obviously ten times brighter indoors than out. One is depressed by the feebleness of the supposed sun, and annoyed by the artificial glare of the footlights.

In evening scenes indoors the windows will, of course, be dark, or a dull blue, and the sources of effective light will be internal and frankly

artificial. Care should be taken to place table lamps, floor lamps, and fireplaces so that the actual light from them may fall upon points of emphasis in the stage groupings. A visible chandelier should not be used unless very necessary for period furnishing, for the reason that it blinds the audience; a concealed floodlight behind the teaser will give general illumination from the ceiling in a natural way, and the audience will not worry much about the source. Footlights and borders may be used in moderation, the former to brighten the faces of the actors and remove the triangular shadows from under their noses, the latter to kill unwanted shadows on the walls. In general, audiences will be much less curious about the sources of artificial light in an evening scene than they will about the sources of supposed daylight.

Symbolic scenes, or scenes intended to convey a single larger mood, can often be played in bold relief with a single source of light at one side or above, and with simple plastic effect. The posture of the character, the composition of the picture, the poetry of the lines, and the emotional effect of the light itself serve to convey the mood. But in scenes depicting subtleties of character, humor, dialogue, or repartee, or revelation of inner thought and feeling, the action must generally be placed in more general illumination and the lighting of the actors' faces considered before either naturalism or abstract beauty.

#### FURNITURE

As a rule it is best to fix the positions of the furniture as carefully in advance as those of the doors and windows, especially of those articles of furniture that are to be used by the actors—tables, chairs, sofas, and the like. Last-minute changes are of course more easily made than in the case of the doors and windows, but are to be avoided as far as possible.

The amateur is often at a great disadvantage in the arrangement of furniture by reason of the small size of the stage on which he is obliged to work. The small stage (say 16 by 10 feet) is crowded to the limit with a davenport, a table, and two chairs, and perhaps one or two wall pieces. Practically speaking, there is only one arrangement of these, with the davenport on one side and the table and chairs on the other (as at *A*, Fig. 8). This can be reversed (as at *B*), but the variation is slight, and after one has seen the two arrangements a few dozen times he begins



to tire of them. If the davenport is placed in the center (as at *C*) there is a freshness of effect, but the spaces at the sides are too limited for freedom of action, and the general feeling is one of stiffness and formality. If it is placed approximately at right angles facing a fireplace (as at *D*), it looks out of scale, and tends to split the room in two. If it is placed against the side wall (as at *E*), one side of the audience does not get a full view, and as soon as you move it out a little you get back to the arrangement at *A*. If the davenport is left out and one or two chairs

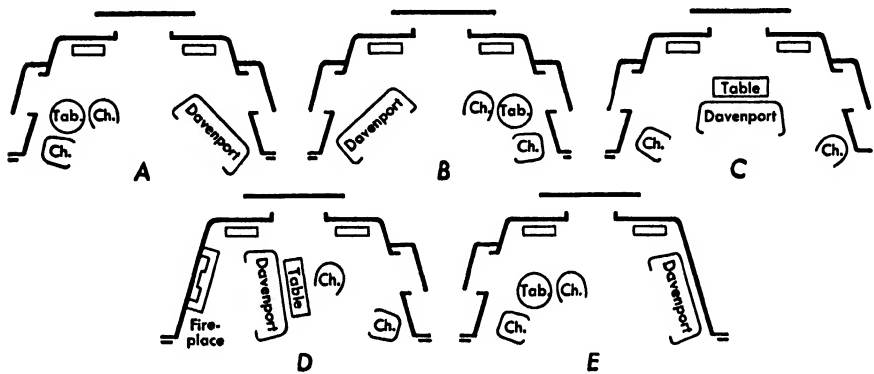


FIG. 8. ARRANGEMENTS OF FURNITURE ON A SMALL STAGE.

substituted there is a slight variation of effect, but the stage is apt to look spotty and disunified. Unless the character of the play is such as to admit of some very unusual arrangement, the director finds himself, therefore, constantly baffled in the attempt to get variety.

A great deal has been said and written about the superior intimacy of the small stage and the cold artificiality of the large one, but the large stage has a distinct advantage when it comes to arranging furniture. It holds more furniture without overcrowding and it permits of an infinite variety of different arrangements without detriment to the playing space and without unnaturalness. The arrangements shown in Fig. 9 merely suggest what utterly different effects may be obtained on a moderately large stage (26 by 15 feet) by rearrangement of the same furniture. The average commercial theatre stage is still larger (perhaps 40 by 20 feet).

In the placing of stage furniture the most important considerations are the following:

1. Have enough furniture to relieve the bareness of the stage, but not

enough to overcrowd it. Either extreme is bad, not only in its direct power of distracting the audience, but also in its effect upon the actor. On a bare stage the actor finds it hard to seem natural. He feels the lack of support, becomes self-conscious, and takes refuge in declamation instead of acting; in a declamatory play this may do no harm, but in a realistic play it is bad. On an overcrowded stage he feels his movements hampered, and is unable to develop the freedom necessary to dramatic contrasts. Of course some plays, and some scenes, call naturally for more furniture than others. A brief street scene may require no furniture at all, and a scene in a poor man's cottage may be appropriately played with very little; while a scene in the living room of a great mansion in which

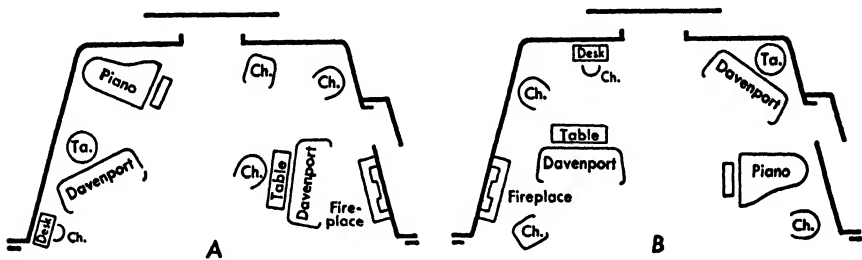


FIG. 9. ARRANGEMENTS OF FURNITURE ON A LARGE STAGE.

a number of guests are to be served with tea may require a great deal. But the best rule is always moderation.

2. Except when there is some point in a stylistic production, avoid startling or conspicuous furniture. Furniture which is too interesting, either in its design or in its placing, is a common source of distraction.

3. Avoid a dead level of furniture. If too many chairs, tables, and sofas are the same height there is a persistent horizontal line across the stage which catches the eye and creates a distraction.

4. Specify chairs and sofas at least 17 inches high; 18 if possible. Lower chairs may suggest ease and comfort when the actors are sitting down, but when it comes time for them to get up there is trouble. It is a real effort to rise from a low, soft chair, and it is impossible to rise from one with freedom, eagerness, and force. This fact is most amusingly brought out in A. A. Milne's play *The Dover Road*, in which the crafty Latimer completely disarms the indignant outbursts of his unwilling visitor by getting him to sit in a particularly low, deep chair. It is dis-

trekking to see the action of a play temporarily suspended while several members of the cast assist the elderly matron to rise from a sofa—or, worse, while she attempts to do so unassisted. In those years when short skirts are in fashion, low seats also create additional worries for the actresses and distractions for the audience.

5. Have the furniture so arranged as to suggest reality, though not necessarily to represent it. It is natural, for example, to place chairs near a table, and a lamp on the table, and to have a davenport near a fireplace. There is no need to imitate the conventional arrangements illustrated in the advertisements of the August furniture sales; but it is best to avoid any arrangement that is queer or outlandish, or that provokes a housewife in the audience to murmur, "If that was my room I'd move that davenport where a body could sit on it and feel like one of the family."

6. At the same time it is essential to remember that the stage is not life, but a conventionalization of life in terms of certain accepted limitations. If the furniture were arranged exactly as in an ordinary living room too many of the actors would have to sit with their backs to the audience, and the latter would feel a sense of exclusion. The stage is not a room with one wall removed. It is a room, or other place, subjected to a peculiar convention, a kind of opening out toward the audience like the unfolding of a flower. One can only acquire a keen sense of this relationship through the study of many stage settings. The setting must give the observer fifty or seventy-five feet away as comprehensive a view of its essential features as one gets of a real room by standing just within it; and this can only be done by some sort of distortion. The thing is to keep the distortion to a minimum; yet a surprising amount is permissible when it is carried out in accordance with the accepted conventions to which audiences are accustomed.

7. Do not place pieces of furniture in position to block the entrances and exits. A clear sweep for characters entering or leaving adds much to the effectiveness of the dramatic action.

8. Be sure that adequate playing space remains for the actors who are not sitting down—space especially for them to cross from right to left or left to right, or diagonally up or down stage. A reasonable amount of freedom in arranging diagonal crosses is a great help to the director

who is trying to break up a "talky" scene, or to maneuver his characters into the positions necessary for some later bit of action.

9. In a long scene, and especially in a long play with only one setting, plan to have some of the chairs moved by the actors at appropriate points in the dialogue. In this way it is possible to get some variety of grouping with comparatively little furniture. But be careful not to have an actor move a chair, sit down on it, pop up again, and put the chair back, all in such a brief time as to make the device seem obvious and unconvincing. Even professional directors sin frequently in this respect. When a chair is moved there should be some apparent reason, as when two people draw their chairs closer together for secrecy in conversation, or when a gentleman places a more comfortable chair for a lady. A chair that has been moved out of place can often be replaced quite naturally a little later by a servant.

What has been said of furniture applies also to other large stage properties. Small properties need not be considered here; some of them have to do with the designing of the setting, and some of them, especially the "hand props," have to do with the action of the play and the business of the characters. The placing of the latter is part of the problem of planning the action itself.



## *Planning the Action*

HOW much of the action of the play, including stage movements and positions, and stage "business," should be planned in advance of rehearsals?

This is a subject of perpetual controversy. Most experienced directors believe in careful preplanning in the matter of stage directions. They believe in fixing every movement, every stage position, every piece of stage business, as early as possible, and making only such changes as may be dictated by unforeseen necessity or discovery of error. At the same time there are a few eminent men of the theatre who hold the opposite view, maintaining that to fix the details of stage movement and business in advance of rehearsals is to stifle the actor's freedom of interpretation and make the performance a soulless piece of mechanism.

Harley Granville-Barker, for example, insists that "the physical action of the play must not be defined while the thought and feeling that should prompt it are still unsure,"<sup>1</sup> and he has the support not only of those careless and lazy people who cannot bring themselves to the labor of thinking things out in advance, and of those supreme egoists who think their unguided inspirations inevitably more truthful than the accumulated experience of others, but also of many thoughtful, conscientious workers in the theatre who believe that true art is unpremeditated, spontaneous, and free of conscious mechanism.

There is, of course, no real disagreement in the major premise: Whatever tends to destroy the actor's freedom of interpretation in such a way as to make his performance coldly mechanical ought certainly to be condemned. Whether or not the actor can be conscious of his technique without loss of art, the audience ought *not* to be conscious of it, ought not to feel the mechanism dominating the thought and emotion. The question at issue is whether adherence to specific stage directions helps or hinders the actor in the attainment of that sort of freedom which we all

<sup>1</sup> *The Exemplary Theatre*, p. 218.

agree is desirable. Since our whole procedure in the planning of a production will depend upon how we answer this question its importance is obvious.

#### UNPREMEDITATED ART

There are those who go so far as to maintain that the action of a play should never be specifically defined, either before or after rehearsals have begun; that the actor should be free to come and go according to his inspiration and to invent his own business under pressure of emotion, and to do it differently at every performance. No one, to be sure, claims that a beginner can act well by this method; the theory presupposes at least an experienced actor, if not a great one. No one whose opinion is worth serious consideration denies that there are limitations imposed by the facts of the play and by the necessity of some slight cooperation with the other players. Granted that the actor ought to know his lines and speak them accurately, that he ought to give the proper cues to his colleagues, that he ought to make his entrances and exits on time and according to the meaning of the play, and that he ought to take his assigned part in the action essential to the plot of the play, the advocates of freedom still demand that he shall not be required to speak a given line from the same spot at every performance, or to light his cigarette on the same line, or to illustrate his emotions with the same piece of business. They demand more. They demand that he shall have as much freedom to reinterpret his part at each performance, and to express his interpretation spontaneously in action, as is possible without actually disrupting the play.

The motive back of this opinion is sound and praiseworthy. It is the feeling that what matters in a play is the content of thought and emotion, and not the technique of expressing it. This is the fundamental basis of good design—what I have called the utilitarian basis. Yet the opinion itself is unmistakably posited upon the notion that good art is necessarily unpremeditated.

A more absurd notion would be hard to find. The very phrase, "unpremeditated art," is a contradiction in terms. If art were unpremeditated the greatest artists would all be babies, for babies are the only people who can be entirely guiltless of premeditation. The very fact that the greatest artists are people of mature experience in art, and that

they grow greater through experience, is sufficient proof that premeditation of some sort is not inconsistent with the highest art. True art is sincere art, but a thing can be wholly sincere without being in the least unpremeditated.

#### ACTING IN THE PALMY DAYS

Advocates of interpretative freedom are constantly referring to the methods of the last century, when great actors traveled about the country playing with resident stock companies, often without rehearsal and usually with only one or two rehearsals in each place. We have no such acting nowadays, they tell us, and no such giants of the stage as Booth, or Barrett, or Forrest, or Charlotte Cushman, or Macready; or their predecessors, Kean, Mrs. Siddons, or Charles Kemble. These people could act anywhere, with anybody, and could dominate the stage and the audience by sheer force of passion and eloquence. No humdrum mechanical repetition in those days. Each performance was different; you could see the same actor in the same part a dozen times and never twice alike.

They neglect to add that of the dozen performances two might be stirringly good, four acceptable, two more dull and lifeless, one a complete artistic failure, and the other three broken up altogether by some disaster to the scenery, or the illness of the star, or a riot in the audience. Variety is the spice of life, and the palmy days were spicy.

As a matter of fact, a little reading in the biographical literature of those times—there is plenty of it available, for every actor or actress of prominence leaves at least one volume of biography or autobiography—will quickly reveal a vast amount of discontent with conditions on the part of the actors themselves. The sincere, painstaking actor of two, three, or four generations ago complained bitterly of the slipshod methods of his time, of the lack of reliable support from the companies he visited, and the lack of time for adequate rehearsal; of the nerve-racking uncertainties of production, and the fact that success in a performance was so dependent upon chance and the inspiration of the moment. Macready tells us that he was thought very eccentric and amateurish because he insisted upon ten or twelve days of study before performing a new role, and that he was much ridiculed for acting at rehearsals. "It was the custom of the London actors," he says, "to do little more at re-

hearsals than to read or repeat the words of their parts, marking in their entrances and exits, as settled by the stage manager, and their respective places on the stage.”<sup>2</sup> Of Charlotte Cushman it is said that “Beyond the due expression and feeling given to the words, which she could never quite wholly omit even in study or at rehearsal, the acting was left to the inspiration of the time and place.”<sup>3</sup> The inference seems to be that she *tried* to omit “the due expression and feeling,” or that her contemporaries expected her to. Whether Miss Cushman approved of the system does not appear, but under it she shone at the expense of the play. Surely Juliet is the most interesting figure in *Romeo and Juliet*, but when Miss Cushman played Romeo the critics praised her for two or three columns without mentioning Juliet. When she played Lady Macbeth her name appeared in very large type and that of the actor playing Macbeth in very small type—even though he might be the leading actor of a very fine resident company (Plate 16). The whole system meant inevitably the exaltation of the exceptional actor with the temperament and the emotional power to thrive under it; but it meant also the subordination of the lesser actor, and an emphasis on parts rather than plays, which is perhaps the chief reason why the giants of day before yesterday stood out so prominently.

Even so, it is well to realize that the giants did not have quite the freedom they are sometimes supposed to have had. In the first place their activities, especially on tour, were for the most part confined to a standard repertory of well-known plays, and for these plays the essential movements and business were already established by tradition, and familiar to experienced actors everywhere. But for this the traveling star system could never have existed at all. The star had, of course, the privilege of making changes, and the chief purpose of rehearsals was to let the supporting actors know what changes were to be made. In the second place even the London actors, as we see by Macready’s remark just quoted, acknowledged the authority of the stage manager to settle their exits and entrances and their respective places on the stage, as all but the most childish temperamental actors always have done.

The chief reason why the matter so established was less elaborate and more sketchy than it is in most modern plays was the fact that the standard drama, especially the poetic drama, was less dependent for its effects

<sup>2</sup> Macready’s *Reminiscences*, p. 109.

<sup>3</sup> Emma Stebbins’ *Life and Letters of Charlotte Cushman*.



upon naturalistic movements and business, and more upon the declamation of the lines. The taste of the time was for a style of acting that many of us today would not call acting at all, a passionate, oratorical style that focused attention upon the actor rather than the play, and compelled acceptance of certain artificial conventions which may or may not have been more artistic than our present conventions but were unquestionably different. It may be doubted whether very many serious critics of the stage today really want to see a return to the conditions of the last century, or would if they understood them.

#### THE PRICE OF FREEDOM

But we have not yet disposed of the contention that for freedom of interpretation the actor must be unhampered by specific stage directions, a contention still made by numerous modern directors quite out of sympathy with the hasty, slipshod methods so common a century ago. To quote again from Mr. Granville-Barker's stimulating book: "In nearly all plays (except, of course, those of pure mime) the physical action is extraordinarily unimportant, the mental and emotional action all in all. Delay, then, in entering the physical phase should not trouble the experienced actor. He has no business to be agitating his mind at rehearsals (much less at a performance) over physical movements, unless they are such matters of gymnastics as fighting, dancing, or the rough and tumble of farce. His training should so have equipped him that all such things come without thought; come one way or another, with one way as right as the other. His thought he needs to match with the plays' thought, and it is not so often he'll have any to spare." And he adds the astounding footnote: "For all that, though, I have known an experienced actor to worry himself almost to death about how he should get out of a stage room when, after all, the only way was through the door."<sup>4</sup>

It is precisely because I agree with Mr. Granville-Barker's premise that I disagree with his conclusions. I agree that the actor "has no business to be agitating his mind at rehearsals (much less at a performance) over physical movements." But if the actor is any good at all he most certainly will agitate his mind about them, unless the director does that work for him in advance; and the footnote cites a case to prove it. There is only one way in which a good actor, in anything but a highly declama-

<sup>4</sup> *The Exemplary Theatre*, p. 212.

tory play, can avoid agitating his mind about physical movements at an actual performance, and that is by having them so well learned in advance that he can perform them without agitation; only thus can he purchase the freedom of mind necessary to real freedom of interpretation. If the actor mentioned in Mr. Granville-Barker's footnote had been told by a competent director which door to go out and how to go out, and had learned the movement at the first rehearsal, he would not have been obliged to agitate his mind about it at later rehearsals—much less at a performance.

The assertion that the physical action will "come one way or another, with one way as right as the other," seems incredible as coming from an experienced man of the theatre. He cannot mean literally that one way is as right as another. He cannot mean that he has never been annoyed in the theatre by an awkward, ugly, or distracting movement, or has never seen an ineffective entrance or exit. He must mean simply that such annoyances are due to the actor's inexperience, and that to the well trained actor—as indeed he says—such things come without thought. Yet he instantly assails his own position by citing, in the footnote, the case of "an experienced actor" to whom such things did *not* come without thought, and who was obliged to agitate his mind about them. He could have cited many others. Most sincere, painstaking actors are quite willing to admit that the business of a play does not come to them without thought; that on the contrary they must pay for their apparent freedom and spontaneity by weeks of intensive labor, by working out every detail of action, by articulating it with the lines, and by memorizing both lines and action so perfectly as to render them almost subconscious.

#### ARE STAGE DIRECTIONS INHIBITORY?

Much of the opposition to specific stage directions lies in the notion that they inhibit the actor, render his performance mechanical, and check his creative impulses.

As a matter of fact they do nothing of the kind—not if they are good stage directions. On the contrary they leave the actor perfectly free to interpret the part in his own way. Of course I refer to directions covering movement and business, and not to coaching or instruction in the meaning of the part. The two things are quite separate. Now and then, it is true, a single specific action planned by the director may prove in-

consistent with some later development of the actor's interpretation; in that case we have a legitimate and proper reason for a change. But the vast majority of stage directions have surprisingly little to do with the individual actor's interpretation of his part.

In illustration I may cite a production of Barrie's *The Admirable Crichton* which I staged many years ago for a college dramatic club. Partly to employ as many members as possible and partly to guard against disaster in case of illness we used two separate casts, giving them identical stage directions and shifting them about at rehearsals until every player was accustomed to playing with every other. This play calls for some very intricate movements and a good deal of business; there are many properties, and in some of the scenes there are many people on the stage at once, all taking part in the action. Our stage was laid out to scale at rehearsals, and all the furniture placed exactly; and every movement was planned down to the most minute detail. There had to be some changes, of course, but all matters of doubt were settled early, and the play was rehearsed almost without change for about six weeks. The action was articulated with the lines, and each player knew exactly the position and attitude in which he was to deliver each word of his part; he knew exactly when to flick the ashes off his cigarette, when and from whom to receive a cup of tea, which hand to take it with, where to sit down, and when to get up. Because of the inexperience of the players and our special desire for a smooth performance we went to extremes, and indulged in much more exacting drill than is at all usual with amateurs or at all necessary with professionals.

Yet a surprising thing happened—surprising at least to those who could not see the use of so much precision, and who were afraid of a mechanical effect. We gave eight performances with the two casts alternating, and half way through the second performance it became evident that we had two different plays! One cast gave us a romantic comedy, the other a cynical, ironical satire. When one cast played the other was always in the audience. There was keen rivalry, and each cast, largely because it did not have to agitate its mind over entrances or exits or stage business, was free to seek new shades of meaning through comparison. Not a single important stage direction was changed during the week, but new inner meanings were brought out at every performance,

and the difference between the two versions grew greater as the week progressed.

Those who were fortunate enough to see three or four of the different companies which played *Life With Father* simultaneously in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and elsewhere, must have been impressed with the amazing precision and uniformity of movement, business, stage pictures, and all matters of technique. But they must also have been impressed with the considerable differences of interpretation between Louis Calhern's "Father" and Howard Lindsay's; between Dorothy Stickney's "Vinnie" and Margalo Gillmore's. Only so far as their imaginative concepts agree will two actors play the same part in the same way—no matter how uniform the teamwork.

With identical stage directions you can have a good or a bad performance, according to the spirit and ability of the actors; or you can have two entirely different interpretations. You can even have two different interpretations by the same company, for there are many cases on record in which the mood or tone of a scene, or even of a whole play, has been changed, without any change in the words or action. It is said that Lemaître created the comic part of Robert Macaire by rehearsing it as the serious melodramatic part it was supposed to be, and then suddenly turning it into burlesque at the opening performance, while the other actors (with the exception of Firmin, who was in the secret) played on with perfect seriousness.

On the whole, it seems quite as absurd to demand that the action of the play be left to the inspiration of the moment, as to demand that the words be improvised differently at each performance, as they were in the vagabond companies of medieval Italy. To the talented and experienced actor the one thing is as likely to come naturally as the other; within certain limitations both are possible, but the result is not very apt to be the highest order of art.

#### THE JAMES-LANGE THEORY

The idea that "the physical action of the play should not be defined while the thought and feeling that should prompt it are still unsure" makes a strong appeal on the ground of common sense and sincerity; but is it in accordance with scientific fact? It seems to me to run afoul of the

so-called "James-Lange Theory," now pretty generally accepted by students of psychology. According to this theory, feeling, or emotion, is not the cause but the result of action. To go back to the law of motor response: For every stimulus received by the organism there is an immediate and direct motor response, the nature of which depends partly upon the nature of the stimulus and partly upon the previous experience of the organism. Whether a given stimulus will produce a given action, or a given motor set, depends upon the thoughts and feelings in the subject's past experience, but not upon a preceding emotion in the given case. It is the motor response that is the primary reaction. What we call feeling or emotion is secondary; it is the realization in consciousness of the motor state.

Thus when we see an automobile bearing down upon us, or hear a warning signal, we do not jump out of the way because we are frightened; we jump out of the way because our experience has taught us to do so automatically, and if we are frightened it is because we have had to jump out of the way. Whether we do jump out of the way depends altogether upon our "conditioned" responses. City-bred people, accustomed to dodging traffic, jump promptly and in the right direction; or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that only those whose responses are conducive to survival have survived. What is often called "presence of mind" is not presence of mind at all, but rather absence of mind; it is neither intellectual nor emotional, but is purely a matter of automatic response properly prepared for by previous training and sufficiently quick and accurate to function before there is time for thought.

Whether the James-Lange theory is sound or not is of course debatable, and the question is too abstruse for discussion here. But in view of its wide acceptance it would seem a little dangerous for a stage director to assume that the action of a play is necessarily or merely the result of the actor's emotions. It may, as a matter of fact, be the cause. At any rate the theory gives some hint of the importance of action in relation to emotion, and suggests the danger of hastily devised and inappropriate action, whether planned early by the director or later by the actor.

It also suggests that the right actions, thoroughly rehearsed to recur automatically, may have some effect in calling up the desired emotions in the actor, and empathically in the audience.

## TECHNIQUE AND TRICKERY

There is another sort of opposition to the careful planning of stage movement and business, a sort that comes less frequently from actors and directors than from critics, authors, and professors of literature. It is based on an exalted worship of sincerity, and takes the form of a denunciation of all conscious technique as a kind of trickery.

One of the best teachers of dramatic literature of our time takes somewhat this view. Whenever one mentions to him the manner in which certain effects are achieved in the theatre through control of attention, creation of suspense and anticipation, invention of business to naturalize movements, and the like, he throws up his hands in deprecation. "Trickery! Trickery!" he says. "All trickery!"

He is right, of course. It is trickery. But so in a sense is all art. The only perfect absence of trickery is to be found in pure accident, and pure accident is not art. Life itself may or may not be pure accident, but art is design—the antithesis of accident.

One of the most eminent representatives of the "No Trickery" party was John Galsworthy. His position in the matter was amusingly stated by William Archer, as follows: "Even the most innocent tricks of emphasis are to him snares of the Evil One. He would sooner die than drop his curtain on a particularly effective line. It is his chief ambition that you should never discern any arrangement, any intention, in his work. As a rule, the only reason you can see for his doing thus or thus is his desire that you should see no reason for it." And Mr. Archer adds: "He does not carry this tendency, as some do, to the point of eccentricity, but he certainly goes as far as any one should be advised to follow. A little further, and you incur the danger of becoming affectedly unaffected, artificially inartificial."<sup>5</sup>

Exactly. If you do not drop your curtain on an effective line you must drop it on an ineffective one; but why in the world should you? What artistic end is achieved by choosing the greater of two evils? By Mr. Galsworthy's own standard, a curtain on an ineffective line is a greater evil than the usual curtain, because it calls attention more insistently to the author's technique. The audience expects an effective

<sup>5</sup> *Playmaking*, p. 328.

curtain, and takes such a curtain as a matter of course, without undue attention to the why and the wherefore. But when the curtain descends on a commonplace line the audience is left wondering whether the stage manager blundered, or, if not, why the author chose such a peculiar ending—wondering, in short, what particularly subtle and elusive brand of trickery he had in mind.

It is a characteristic of enthusiasts that they seldom examine alternatives; they consider the frying pan but not the fire. When sincere artists revolt against the pettiness and crudity and obtrusiveness of much modern stage technique they are abundantly justified by the facts; but they are not right in concluding that all stage technique is bad, nor are they right in substituting an obtrusive and distracting absence of technique—a technique of ostentatious inartificiality.

With respect to the movement and grouping of characters on the stage it is well to remember that the alternative is not between an effective grouping and no grouping. It is between an effective grouping and an ineffective one. If the characters are on the stage at all they are making some kind of an impression on the audience, and if the director does not see to it that the impression is helpful to the purpose of the play it is pretty sure to be detrimental. A bad group or movement is just as distracting, just as inimical to sincerity, as a good one, and it is unpleasant in its own right besides. If the director does not control the empathic responses of his audience the audience will empathize anyhow, and in all probability they will empathize in the wrong things. That is exactly what happens when an actor makes an awkward or amateurish movement or gesture, or stands in an awkward posture, or does not know what to do with his hands. Well-planned movement or business has at least this virtue, that it keeps the actor's body occupied and prevents him from doing all sorts of wrong things and so stirring up unwanted effects.

One cannot too strongly insist upon this negative side of stage technique. Good stage technique lies quite as much in knowing what to avoid as in knowing what to do, and one of the best reasons for trying consciously to do an effective thing is to guard against the likelihood of doing an ineffective or positively distracting thing unconsciously. It may seem illogical to emphasize the negative side of a creative art, but the point is that the artist must keep the imagination of the audience working on his side. So long as he can avoid doing the wrong thing he



Geddes

*Plate 1. Contrasting Types of Formalism.* ABOVE: A permanent setting for *Hamlet*, built of steps, ramps and platforms, extending beyond the proscenium into the audience and dispensing with the use of a curtain. Designed by Norman Bel Geddes. BELOW: A Broadway production with no scenery at all; *Our Town* on a bare stage (in this case much less ugly than some on which it was played).

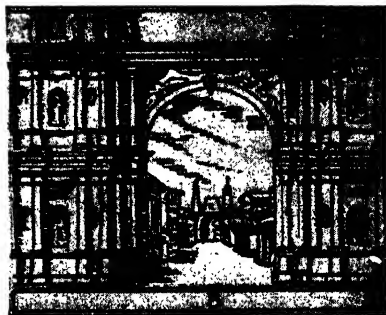
Vandamm







1585



c. 1600



c. 1600



17

*Plate 2. Varied Forms of the Proscenium.* Key points in 300 years of theatre history: (a) Proscenium of the Olympic Theatre at Vicenza. (b) Sketch by Inigo Jones, for an enlarged center arch. (c) Design for a tragic scene by Jerome Bols, showing a picture-frame proscenium. (d) Proscenium of Drury Lane Theatre in Garrick's time, set for *The School for Scandal*. (e) The arch reappears; Covent Garden in 1810. (f) Vestigial arch as decoration for the picture frame; Palmer's Madison Square Theatre in 1885.

1810

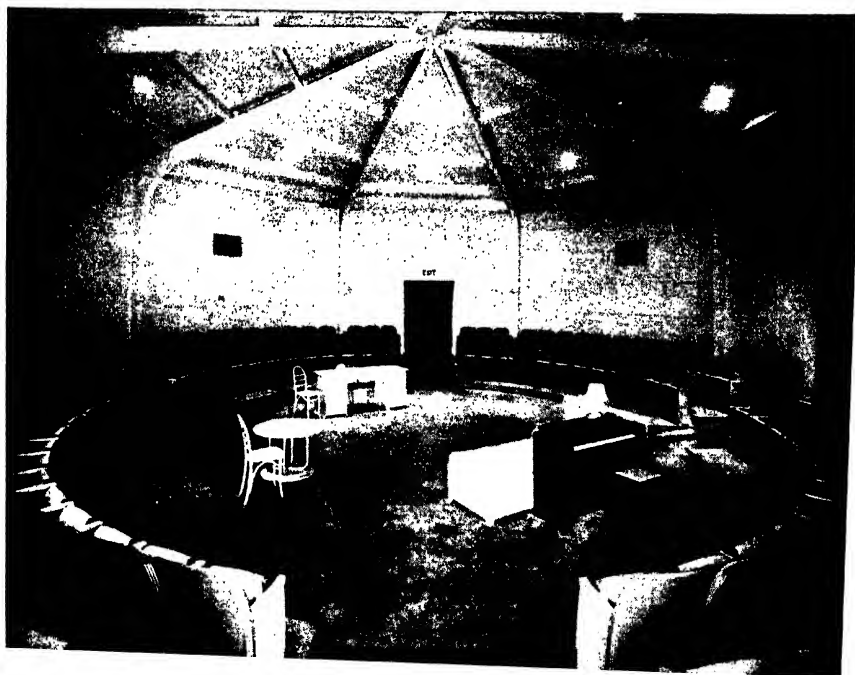
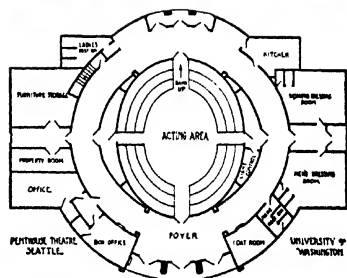


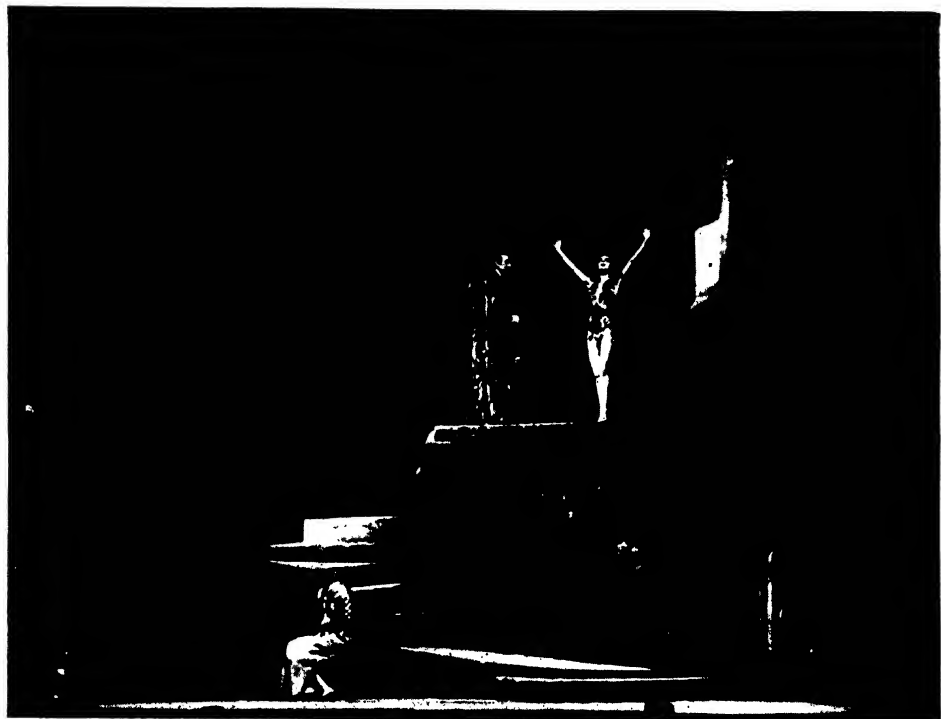
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*Plate 3. The Proscenium Vanishes. A theatre designed exclusively for "arena" production; the Penthouse Theatre at the University of Washington. Originated and directed by Glenn Hughes. Photos by Charles Bell*





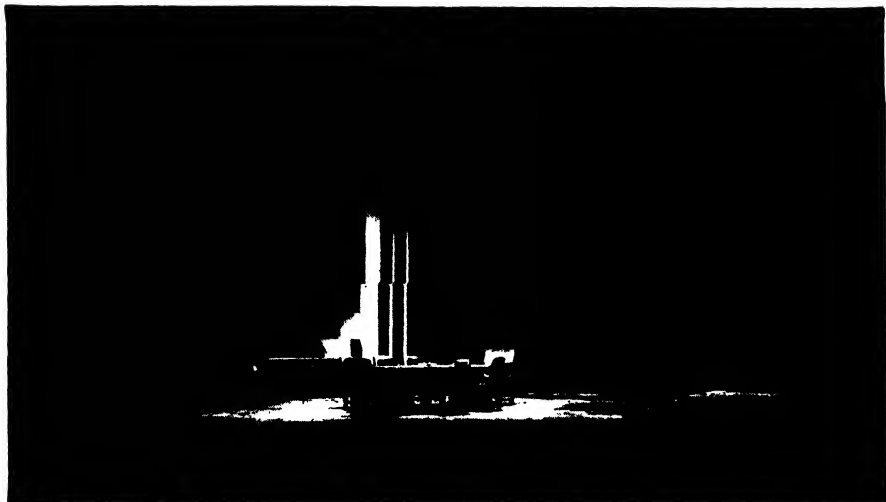
*Eileen Darby—Graphic House*



*Plate 4. Revolving Single-Unit Sets. ABOVE: The Margaret Webster production of *The Tempest*. Settings and costumes by Motley. BELOW: Three scenes from *Mary Stuart*, at the New Jersey State Teachers' College, Trenton. Director and designer, Effie G. Kuhn.*

*Photos by Lycia O. Martin*





Gordon Conner

Plate 5. *Space-Stage Techniques, Lavish and Simple.*

ABOVE: A formal, dignified setting by Arch Lauterer, for *Overture* at the Cleveland Playhouse. BELOW: Simplified realism; a setting by Lee Simonson for *The Failures*. INSERT: The drinking scene from *Twelfth Night* in a concentrated spotlight.



Vandamm



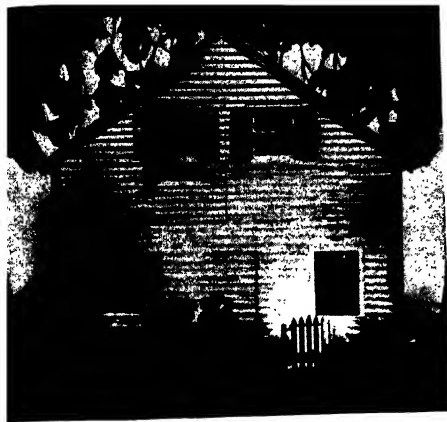


Vandamm

*Plate 6. Stylization in Broadway Musicals.* ABOVE: A setting for *Oklahoma!* In a mild vein of humorous exaggeration; designer, Lemuel Ayers. BELOW: The skaters' ballet scene from *Up in Central Park*, highly stylized in the manner of the Currier and Ives print, in a setting by Howard Bay.

Lucas-Pritchard





New York Public Library

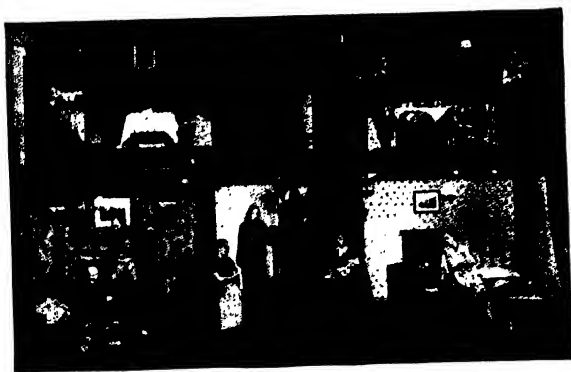


Plate 7. *Examples of Divided Settings.* AT TOP: Two arrangements of the trap-nest setting by Robert Edmond Jones for *Desire Under the Elms*. AT BOTTOM: A cut-out set for *The Voice of the Turtle*, by Stewart Chaney; the distraction of broken realism is here mitigated by the darkened edges of the walls, by good pictorial composition, and (in action) by good light control. AT CENTER: An elaborate multiple setting for *Behind the Blinds* with separate curtains to offset the broken realism.

Vandamm





*Vandamm*

*Plate 8. Stage Realism At Its Zenith.* Two of the most famous actuality scenes in Broadway history. ABOVE: Jo Mielziner's setting for *Street Scene*. BELOW: East River dock setting by Norman Bel Geddes for *Dead End*. The desirability of stage realism may be debatable, but not the excellence of these examples—both by artists equally successful in non-realistic design.

*Geddes*



need offer little more than suggestion, and the imagination of the audience will do the rest; but the moment he does something obtrusively ineffective the imaginative concept is shattered.

#### DICTATORSHIP OR DEMOCRACY

Whether much or little of the action is to be planned in advance, the question still remains: Who is to plan it? Shall the director work it out in advance of rehearsals and then dictate it ready-made to the actors; or shall the actors be allowed to work it out for themselves in rehearsal, with the director serving merely as critic?

Upon this question, also, expert opinion differs. Some directors, thinking first of the importance of unity in the production, insist upon the autocratic method. Gordon Craig, with his idea of the actors as "über-marionettes" and the director supreme, exemplifies this view. Others, moved by a love of sincerity in realism, feel that action evolved "naturally" in rehearsal, with comparatively little interference from the director, is more likely to be right.

The history of Stanislavsky and the Moscow Art Theatre affords an interesting exposition of both points of view. At one time, as Stanislavsky himself tells us in his autobiography, it was his custom to plan every detail of the action before calling a rehearsal, and to require rigid adherence to it on the part of his actors. In later years he went to the other extreme, and the method advocated in his later writings is to begin with round-table discussion of the play, followed by informal rehearsal, at which the actors try out various movements, offer suggestions, and continue the discussions until the finished play gradually evolves.

How much of the fine ensemble playing of the Moscow group has been due to the latter method, and how much to the rigorous training which the older actors received under the earlier method, is a matter of speculation. In my own judgment most of it has not been primarily due to either. I believe that the greatness of the Moscow Art Theatre is to be attributed chiefly to the high character of the artists, to their painstaking sincerity, to the solidarity of the group, and to the long period of study and rehearsal given to each play before its first performance. Under such conditions either method might give good results.

The advantage of what may be called the democratic method lies in the greater opportunity for creative work on the part of the individual



artist, and the greater stimulus to group imagination. But this advantage cannot be fully realized unless there is abundant time for careful study and rehearsal, and unless the players are experienced, and able to lose themselves imaginatively in the parts. The original Moscow players, men and women of education and character, associated through long years of sincere creative effort, were able to realize it as few others could.

But even the Moscow players could not escape all the faults of the democratic method. The system makes for good naturalism, but good naturalism is not necessarily good theatre. Real life is full of meaningless accident, of planless and unbeautiful distraction; but a play ought not to be. In the Moscow production of *The Three Sisters*—as seen in this country some years ago—there were some remarkable ensemble scenes, in which family and friends came and went, servants answered the doorbell, dinner was served, there was laughter, music, and movement, and all was carried off with sincerity and conviction, not to say dash. But there were some awkward stage pictures; there were clumsy movements; actors got in each other's way, blanketed each other's lines, and played important bits from unemphatic positions; in short there were theatrical imperfections which no competent American stage director would tolerate. They were natural enough, in the sense that they might happen in real life, but in the theatre such things are distracting; they take attention from more important things, and they are displeasing in themselves.<sup>6</sup>

The obvious answer to this criticism is that it is better to have some technical imperfections coupled with great artistic power and sincerity than to have technical perfection without the sincerity, and in this one may concur. But I do not believe the alternative is inevitable. Certainly there is no inevitable alternative between dictatorship and mob rule. There is a middle course, analogous perhaps to government by responsible ministry, recognizing neither the divine right of autocracy nor the divine right of do-as-you-please. In a permanent theatre it may be wise to provide some form of appeal from arbitrary rulings of the stage director, but it is not wise to leave those matters that are largely matters of teamwork either to pure accident or to the whims of a dozen diverse and changeable temperaments.

<sup>6</sup> I had the pleasure of talking this matter over with a former member of Stanislavsky's company. He sustained my criticism of *The Three Sisters*, and told me that the imperfections I have mentioned were well known to the players.

After all, the real test is the test of results. With the possible exception of one or two Belasco plays, I think I have never seen a production the faults of which could be in any way attributed to too much dictation of movement and position by the director; but I have seen scores of productions, amateur and professional, that were ragged and restless for the very obvious reason that the actors were moving pretty much as they pleased and very much at cross purposes. Rare indeed is the amateur production that could not be improved by more detailed, more skillful, and more unified direction of movement.



## *Stage Movement*

ASSUMING that stage movement,<sup>1</sup> stage groupings, and stage pictures are to be carefully planned, what principles and methods should govern the planning?

The problem is a problem in design, and the principles that apply are the principles of design as we have already considered them. But they must be translated into the concrete terms of stage technique.

In plotting stage movements one must remember that the movements, and even the characters themselves, are but parts of a composite design, of which the central element is the thought of the play; and that success will depend not only upon the director's grasp of the thought but upon his ability to visualize his characters against a background of setting and furnishing, of line, mass, and color; and upon his power to coordinate speech, action, and sometimes music, into a single harmonious composition.

To assist him in visualizing the movements he will sometimes find it expedient to employ some sort of mechanical aid—something to stimulate the imagination. Of course he will lay out the stage setting of each scene in the form of a plan on paper, and mark on the plan the positions of the entrances and of the furniture. Often he will find it helpful to mount the plan on a soft drawing board and use push pins to represent the characters, moving them about as a means of studying the groupings. Bits of colored sealing wax molded over discarded phonograph needles make excellent push pins for the purpose—this being, I believe, the only known use for discarded phonograph needles. Some directors construct cardboard models of the settings, and even of the properties, and use little paper-doll figures to represent the characters. For decorative or symbolic plays, in which stage pictures, lighting effects, and color

<sup>1</sup> The distinction between stage movement and stage business is not an exact one, and there are many overlappings, but in general the term movement refers to changes in the location of the characters on the stage, the term business to bits of individual illustrative action.

harmonies are of first importance, the latter method has special advantages. It is also helpful when the setting includes stairways, ramps, and various acting levels affecting the vertical aspects of the stage picture. For ordinary plays, and especially for those involving many characters in rapid motion, the horizontal plan is probably more helpful.

### METHODS OF NOTATION

For setting down stage movements in the prompt book some method of notation is necessary. The terms Right (R.), Left (L.), and Center (C.) are almost universally employed in this country to designate stage positions—right meaning the actor's right as he faces the audience. Most directors also use the terms Right Center (R.C.) and Left Center (L.C.) for the intermediate positions. "Down," or "down stage," means toward the audience, and "up," or "up stage," away from the audience. The direction to proceed from one side to the other is usually indicated by the word "cross" or the sign X. In most professional prompt books these are about the only terms used, and directions are given only in a very rough way. The experienced actor is supposed to perfect the details himself. Thus when he is told to "cross down R." he is supposed to know instinctively which way and how far to go.

It sometimes happens, however, that a single direction may mean any one of a half dozen things. In *A*, Fig. 10, for example, an actor up left (U.L.), told to "cross down R.," might follow any one of the paths indicated. When, because of the inexperience of the actors, or for any other reason, it becomes desirable to specify movements in more detail, some more accurate system must be found. The zoning system illustrated in *B* and *C*, Fig. 10, serves the purpose very effectively. It has the merit of retaining the usual designations of R., R.C., C., L.C., and L., and the lateral zones may correspond roughly with the old wing entrances, L.1.E., L.2.E., and so on (*G*, Fig. 6, page 85).

In laying out a zoning plan it is important to know the exact dimensions of the set, and consequently of the zones, and to place all articles of furniture accurately to scale. A davenport, for example, may be 6 to 7 feet long by 3 feet wide; the largest chair is about 3 feet square. In *B*, Fig. 10, the proscenium opening is 25 feet, the depth 15 feet, and the zones 5 feet each way. In *C* the proscenium opening is 40 feet, the depth 20 feet, and the zones 8 feet one way and 5 feet the other.

Such a system as this makes it possible to record stage directions with reasonable precision. When an actor at L.3 in *B* or *C* is told to cross to R.C.2, shake hands with Mr. Jones, and at his invitation sit down R.1, he knows exactly what is meant.

The commercial director and the inspirational director may laugh at a scheme so mechanical; but when one is dealing with inexperienced

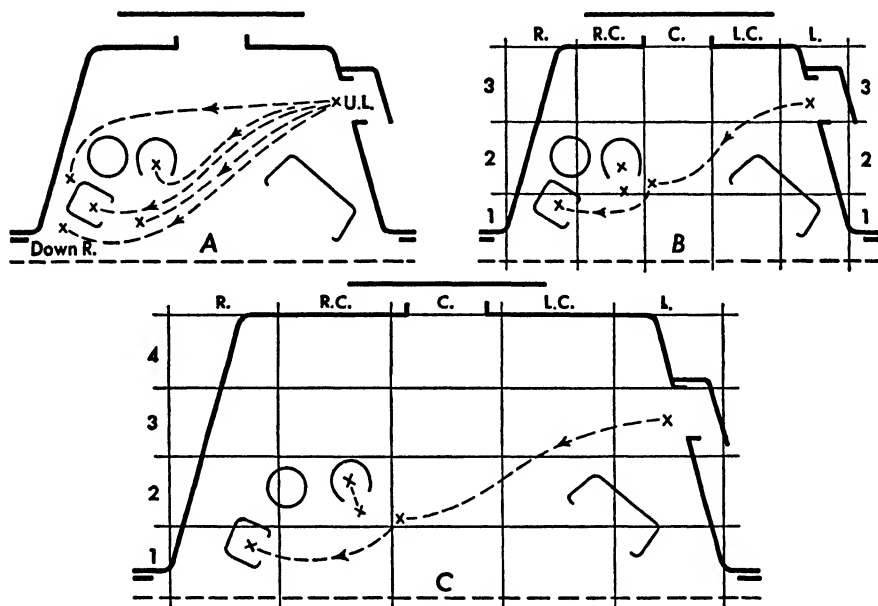


FIG. 10. METHODS OF PLOTTING STAGE MOVEMENTS.

players and a fairly intricate play it saves much time in the early rehearsals, and that time can be very valuable later for polishing.

#### NO MOVEMENT WITHOUT A PURPOSE

The first and most important principle in the designing of stage movements is to avoid all purposeless movement.

The soundness of this principle is apparent, yet it is constantly being violated by inexperienced actors and directors, and sometimes by experienced ones. Nothing is more difficult to achieve than unaffected repose; the untrained actor fidgets and wanders whenever he is on the stage, unable to keep his hands or his feet still, yet having no conscious

purpose in moving them. The director must teach him to suppress this tendency, or to divert it into purposeful movement.

To say that there should be no movement without a purpose is not to say that a play should be all talk, with the actors sitting or standing about like statues. There are plenty of legitimate reasons for stage movement, and whenever one of them is present and not inconsistent with the larger purpose of the scene, or of the play, it is possible to design an appropriate movement. But purposeless movement is never good design, because movement attracts attention, and purposeless movement *distracts* it from the thought of the play. Every movement should have a purpose, and the purpose should be associated, or at least consistent, with the main purpose of the scene and of the play. That is the fundamental principle of all design, the principle of the utilitarian basis.

#### TYPES OF STAGE MOVEMENT

Among the many types of stage movement, classified according to purpose, the following are most important:

1. Movement dictated by the plot itself, or prescribed by the dramatist as essential action. Such movement is, as a rule, the easiest to follow, and the least likely to create distraction, being naturally part of the main interest of the play. The entrances and exits of characters ordinarily belong to this class; also such movements as are involved in fighting, dancing, hiding behind screens, serving stage meals, telephoning, and the like. While this type of movement is not foolproof, it is less likely to be overlooked by the director or to lead him into difficulty than some of the other types.

2. Movement for delineation of character, or state of mind. For this purpose stage business is more often useful than stage movement, but movement serves to convey some of the broader effects. A restless or excited character, for example, should be moved about the stage frequently, and may sit down and jump up a half dozen times in a short scene; a calm or phlegmatic character must do nothing of the kind. A firm character may be given straightforward, decisive movements; a weak or bewildered character should be given little, aimless, abortive ones.

Since character is likely to be closely associated with the purpose of the play, this type of movement, like the first, is fairly easy to handle

and to keep within the bounds of unity. The chief danger is that of over-emphasis on unimportant but interesting minor characters.

3. Movement for emphasis. This is a little less obvious and not so generally understood. Some directors seem to think that emphasis is just a matter of having important lines spoken forcefully, and that it is largely the business of the individual actor. However, the audience is watching, not an actor, but a play—a complex thing spread over a large stage, with many actors, and with the center of interest constantly shifting. Out of this complexity it is the director's task to pick those elements which the dramatist would wish to have emphasized, and make them stand out. The actor must, of course, "point up" the important line; but before he can do so the director must maneuver him into an effective position—often the center of the stage, but not always so—and must do it in such a way as to focus attention upon him at the right moment.

Moreover, there is a kind of emphasis in movement itself, and certain types of movement are more emphatic than others. A quick movement, for example, is normally more emphatic than a slow one; the emphasis, however, is in the contrast, and on a stage where everybody else is moving, the one character who remains motionless may seem most emphatic. A movement toward stage center is ordinarily more emphatic than one toward the wings, and a movement toward the audience more emphatic than one away from the audience. Even that may have exceptions, like the superbly emphatic exit straight up stage center made by Helen Hayes as the Queen in *Victoria Regina*. When a movement accompanies a line, there is a gain in emphasis if the movement is started a little ahead of the line; a loss if it is started later. One may work out a whole system of normal contrasts in emphasis based in this way upon types of movement.

4. Movement for control of attention. This, of course, includes movement for emphasis; but the general problem of controlling attention in the theatre is so important and so little understood by most amateurs as to demand separate consideration in a later chapter. Movement is only one means to such control, but skillfully handled it is a legitimate means.

5. Movement for suspense and anticipation. Half the force of a dramatic episode lies in the proper preparation for it, the proper creation of suspense and anticipation in the minds of the audience. The dramatist knows this, and provides for it by what is called "dramatic foreshad-

owing"—that is, by "planting" certain ideas in advance, and by anticipatory lines of dialogue. But at least a part of the problem still rests with the director, and proper control of stage movement may be one factor in the solution. The entrance of an important character, for example, may be made more effective if the characters already on the stage are so moved as to create a gap in the stage picture at the point where the character is to appear. In Act One of Drinkwater's *Abraham Lincoln*, in the original American production, the first entrance of Lincoln was skillfully anticipated. The scene was in Lincoln's home. Two of his neighbors, who had come to congratulate him on his nomination, were conversing by the fireplace at stage right, and waiting for him to appear, while the entire left side of the stage was vacant. The only door was at stage left. The unbalanced picture at once created an expectation of Lincoln's entrance. After a moment the door opened, and in came—not Lincoln, but a pert serving maid, who bustled about for a moment, more than filling the gap, and then went out, leaving, by contrast, a greater sense of emptiness than before. The emptiness was sustained for two or three minutes, during which one's desire to see Lincoln grew more and more insistent; then the door opened, and in came—again not Lincoln, but Mrs. Lincoln. She also filled the gap pictorially, yet one felt a restless impatience to have her out of the way, and a sense of relief when, after giving a hint that her husband would soon appear, she also went out. "Now," we thought, "we shall see Lincoln," and our anticipation had reached its highest pitch. A little too much delay at this point and the whole effect would have been spoiled; our impatience would have turned to annoyance and disgust. But the timing was perfect, and in just a few seconds more the door opened a third time and Lincoln appeared, becoming instantly the focus of attention. Perhaps the chief gain through the use of this device was the fact that it permitted the quietest and most repressed sort of acting on the part of the actor playing Lincoln, without loss of emphasis; had there been no preparation he would have had to "act up" a little in order to dominate the scene.

6. Movement for pictorial effect. The desirability of good stage pictures is well known, and generally appreciated by the amateur. Movement for the purpose of maneuvering characters into good pictorial groups, and out of bad ones, is clearly justified, and if not performed too



suddenly or too pointedly it is ordinarily quite satisfying to the audience.

The principles of composition in design we have already considered, and stage pictures should be good in composition. Some directors, however, fail to realize the extent to which good composition in stage pictures may differ from good composition in painting or sculpture. In painting there are but two dimensions, with a suggestion of the third. In sculpture there are three; but in stage pictures there are four.

The fourth dimension is time. Stage life is not still life; it is moving, dynamic, and the composition of every picture, like that of every chord in music, is affected by memory of what preceded and anticipation of what is to follow. In music it is possible to use some very inharmonious chords by way of transition to better ones; and in the same way it is possible to use some bad stage pictures in the course of a rapidly moving scene, provided only that the action is not allowed to rest on the bad ones. Whenever there is anything in the nature of a tableau on the stage the picture should be good in composition.

In a painting, each element affects the composition almost at its face value; but in a stage picture—even a tableau lasting several minutes—each element has a value dependent upon association of ideas through other pictures in the series. Thus a very good stage picture might seem a very poor pictorial composition to a newcomer just entering the theatre; and a single exposure from a well-directed photoplay might make a very poor “still” picture of the scene. Indeed, the photoplay director usually has a number of specially posed “stills” taken for advertising purposes, because pictures clipped from the film are not good enough as separate pictures, and do not tell enough of the story. As parts of a moving composition they may be excellent, but as separate compositions they are often dead and meaningless.

7. Movement for rhythm. The place of rhythm in the movement of ballet, opera, and musical comedy is obvious enough, but it is only in recent years that we have begun to realize the tremendous possibilities of rhythm in serious drama. The rhythm of poetic verse has long been established as an element of drama (although it is now the fashion of some actors to obliterate it, even in Shakespeare), and various forms of prose rhythm have been effectively used by such dramatists as Synge, Masfield, and O'Neill. But rhythm of movement is to the modern producer of serious plays largely a new toy—or rather an old one re-

discovered, since it was common enough in the festival drama of primitive times. Just as the poet and musician have used rhythm of sound for direct expression of mood, the modern producer is learning to use rhythm of movement. A little study of such plays as *The Emperor Jones*, *The World We Live In*, *R. U. R.*, *The Gods of the Mountains*, *Liliom*, *The Beggar on Horseback*, *Mr. Moneypenny*, *The Skin of Our Teeth*, *The Warrior's Husband*, and *Jim Dandy* will reveal some of the opportunities. There is almost as much room for development here as in the matter of setting and lighting.

8. Movement for tempo. Most plays call for variations of pace, partly as a means of avoiding monotony and partly as a means of expressing variations of mood and emphasis. Some scenes should proceed more rapidly than others—or seem to do so. The most obvious changes of tempo are of course those in the utterance of the lines, but these may be supplemented by variations in the rate and character of the movements.

9. Movement for position. Movements not in themselves clearly motivated are often necessary as a preliminary means of getting characters into position for later movements, or for business. Naturally, such preliminary movements should be as unobtrusive as possible; in the hands of an unskilled director they are very apt to seem arbitrary and mechanical.

10. Movement for compensation. When, for good reasons, a character must be moved from one place to another, it often happens that the balance of the group is upset, and to restore it some sort of compensating movement on the part of another character becomes necessary. A good actor with years of training should make such compensating movements naturally and almost unconsciously; but some otherwise good actors are temperamentally insensitive to the stage picture, and would not learn to “give” or “fill in” in fifty years of experience. It is worth remembering that many of the best compensating movements actually precede the movements they are designed to balance (see *B*, Fig. 12, page 124).

11. Movement for illustrating changes of thought or relationship. The grouping of characters on the stage should suggest their relationship; and changes of relationship should be symbolized by changes of grouping. When this is skillfully done one can follow the meaning much more easily.

12. Movement for relief. In almost every play there are moments of monotony, of "talkiness," or of too sustained emotional strain, and the wise director will seek to provide some sort of relief from them, by movement or otherwise. It should be remembered, however, that movement for relief means movement for the relief of the audience—not the actor. The most awkward and fidgety movements of the rankest amateur are in the nature of relief for the actor—but hardly for the audience.

Other legitimate purposes of movement might be mentioned, but these are the most important and will serve to suggest the possibilities. A skillful director will contrive to design the movements in such a way as to accomplish the various purposes harmoniously and with the greatest economy of means; that is, he will make one movement serve several purposes at the same time. He will also take pains to articulate the movements with the lines and with the individual "business" of the actors.

#### TRADITIONAL RULES OF STAGE MOVEMENT

The professional stage abounds in traditions, technical as well as personal. Many of them have to do with particular plays, but there are some general rules of stage movement, business, and acting technique that have been handed down for generations, and regarded, especially by those to the theatre born, as more or less sacred. The tendency in the "art" theatres nowadays is to discard such rules along with the footlights and the proscenium arch and other moss-backed traditions, on the ground that they hamper the artist's freedom of expression. But it is just as stupid to cast them aside without analysis as to obey them blindly. The best way for the intelligent actor or director to treat them is to study them with a view to understanding the æsthetic or psychological principles involved, and then to apply the principles rather than the rules.

Among the traditional rules that may affect the designing of stage movement, the most important are the following:

1. The actor should always face the audience when speaking. This is a blanket rule inherited from the days when acting was declamation; under modern conditions it may often be modified. An occasional line may well be spoken away from the audience, but only for good reasons and with proper compensation of voice and attitude. The principle is reasonable

enough—namely, that the play is for the audience and should as a whole be played toward them.

2. Humorous or telling lines should be spoken straight front, with a sort of round-eyed frankness, and with a slight lift toward the balcony. This rule, of course, can be overworked, but the psychology is sound and audiences are accustomed to the convention without realizing it. Many a good line is thrown away through needless disregard of the principle involved, which is simply that the actor must signal the author's intention to the audience without establishing direct communication with them. When he can think of a better way of doing so, no harm is done. The device is especially useful in conveying "dry" humor, which is apt, otherwise, to miss its laugh.

3. All important scenes should be played down stage. This is an inheritance from the apron stage of the eighteenth century and the platform stage of the sixteenth, and may be modified considerably in the modern theatre. The principle involved is simply that of emphasis, including audibility and visibility.

4. Movements should follow straight lines. This obviously admits of exceptions, and even the principle is open to dispute on the score of grace. The intention is to make the movements seem decisive and purposeful, and this in itself is generally good.

5. An entering character should come well on stage and not linger in the entrance—especially a side entrance. This is an excellent rule except when the action of the play calls for unmistakable exceptions.

6. When two characters enter in conversation, the one speaking should come last. The idea is that otherwise the speaker would have to turn and address the person following, thereby blocking his entrance. Numerous exceptions suggest themselves at once, as, for instance, when the speaker is a master or mistress and the other a servant.

7. An exit should always be made on a line; that is, a character should not go out while another is talking. If necessary the line should be broken by a pause, so that the last few words may be spoken from the doorway as the character goes out. The reason underlying this rule is that a character going out when others are speaking distracts attention from them and at the same time renders his own exit ineffective; on the other hand if he finishes speaking some distance from the exit and the others withhold their speeches until he is gone there is an awkward stage

wait. Of course, even the latter is sometimes justified by the meaning, as it was in the memorable exit of Marie, in *Liliom*, mentioned in an earlier chapter.

8. When two characters in conversation are to sit on a sofa or davenport, the one who is to talk most, or whose words are most important, should be placed at the up-stage end. This, of course, is merely a device to enable that character to face the audience.

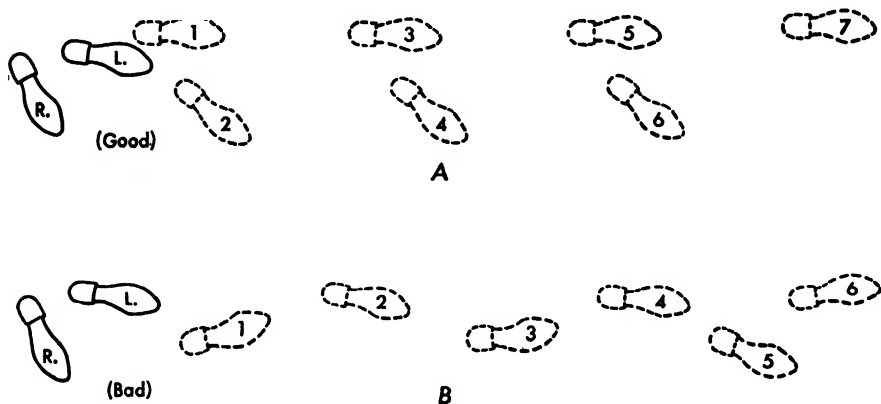


FIG. 11. FOOT POSITIONS IN TRADITIONAL STAGE TECHNIQUE.

9. When a character stands at stage right his weight should rest on his right (or down-stage) foot, and his left (or up-stage) foot should be slightly advanced (*A* and *B*, Fig. 11). For a character at stage left the directions should be reversed.

10. When a character at stage right starts to walk toward the left, he should start by taking a half step with his left (or up-stage) foot, and then a full step with his right (or down-stage) foot. If he is to speak as he moves, or if the movement is to be leisurely, he should advance his left foot farther than his right to keep him facing partly toward the audience (*A*, Fig. 11).

These two rules, if applied with literal precision, carry acting back to the artificial declamatory technique of the last century. Yet they cannot be entirely ignored, for nothing is uglier than the movement by which a character partly facing the audience at stage right starts to walk left with the *right* foot, crossing it over the left (*B*, Fig. 11). It makes him look pigeon-toed, and at the same time swings him away from the audience in an awkward manner.

11. When a character in a similar position at stage right is to back off a little farther to the right, he should shift his weight to the left foot without moving it and take his first backward step to the right with his right foot. This movement should be used very sparingly; most amateurs have to be cautioned not to walk backward at all except for very good reasons. A particularly bad trick of many amateurs in making a cross is to pivot before the cross is completed and then finish it walking backward.

12. All turns should be executed toward the audience, not away from it; that is, an actor walking to stage left and back should turn to his right, not to his left. This is an old rule that has been so rigidly applied by professionals (even in the moving pictures) as to result in occasional absurdity. I have seen an actor execute a veritable pirouette through 270 degrees to avoid turning 90 degrees with his back to the audience.

13. When a character is to kneel on one knee, it should be the down-stage knee; that is, if he is kneeling at stage center facing left, his right knee should be down and his left up.

14. When a man and woman embrace, the man's down-stage arm should be below the woman's, his up-stage arm above. The object, of course, is to let the woman's face, rather than the man's, swing toward the audience as they relax.

Some of these rules may seem very old-fashioned and arbitrary, yet there is a good deal of wisdom and experience packed into them. The director who will consider each of them in its relation to empathy, æsthetic distance, and the principles of design, can hardly fail to learn something of value; at least he may learn when the rule can be safely violated.

#### SUGGESTIONS AND WARNINGS

In designing stage movements one must constantly remind himself that the stage is not real life, but a conventionalized representation of life; hence the warping of the stage setting, the opening out of the stage picture, the suppression of unnecessary detail—including all accidental or meaningless movements—the selection and emphasis of essentials. It is for the latter purpose that stage movements should ordinarily be free, bold, and decisive, as well as meaningful, like the lines of a crayon

sketch or the color masses of a poster picture. They are to register on the audience suggestively, with a minimum of distraction. The pest of amateur dramatics is the "stage wanderer"—the actor who edges and sidles about the stage, fidgets constantly, and is never still. His movements may be "natural," but there are so many of them and they are so indecisive and characterless that they mean nothing. Good movements do not complicate; they simplify and clarify.

Many directors think of stage movement entirely in terms of the grouping of characters. This is important, pictorially and psychologically, but less important than the main business of conveying the thought of the play. Movements designed for the sake of the picture alone are subject to more or less alteration in rehearsal, since the full effect cannot be accurately determined until costumes, scenery, and lights have been tried out together. Inexperienced directors must be warned against:

1. Grouping characters for pictorial effect at the expense of meaning.
2. Designing an excellent stage picture in line and mass, only to have in turn out an atrocity in color.
3. "Dressing the stage" too carefully—as with too much symmetry, or too even a distribution of characters. The latter makes for spottiness and against unity, besides obscuring the meaning.

In regard to the psychology of grouping, it should be remembered that proximity of characters ordinarily suggests relationship, while distance suggests isolation, and that a down-stage position, or a central position, denotes importance, at least with respect to the thought of the moment.

#### ASIDES AND SOLILOQUIES

One of the most troublesome problems in stage movement is the provision for "asides" and "soliloquies." When a character in soliloquy has the stage to himself he may of course take the center; but when a character speaks apart, other characters being on the stage, it is ordinarily best to give him the extreme position down right or down left. When two groups are to hold separate conversations, each unheard by the other, it is obviously well to separate them as far as possible right and left. Nothing could be more stupidly unconvincing than the arrangement used some years ago in the restaurant scene in *Déclassée*, in which persons at a table far up stage conducted an aside conversation (for the benefit

of the audience) by shouting it over the heads of other characters at a down-stage table who were not supposed to hear it—though it must have nearly deafened them. The same fault occurred, not quite so offensively, in the closet scene of the Barrymore *Hamlet*, when Hamlet spoke his asides over the head of the praying King, who was between him and the audience. In the Norman Bel Geddes production, however, where the King knelt on a high platform with his shadow thrown still higher on the wall behind, and Hamlet suddenly appeared in the shadow at the higher level, the effect was excellent, for there was no realism to challenge the logic.

The problem of maneuvering the characters into suitable positions is sometimes very difficult; often the dramatist prescribes several aside conversations of different groups of characters within a very few moments, as Barrie does in the tea scene of *The Admirable Crichton*, and it taxes the director's ingenuity to make all of these convincing and at the same time to make the movements leading up to them seem natural.

In the eighteenth century it was the custom for an actor having an aside speech intended for the audience to advance a step or two and speak it directly to them. This brings him completely out of the picture, and to a modern audience is a good deal of a shock; but in plays like *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal* it is so much a part of the period atmosphere that the convention is best retained, perhaps with the aid of a program note.<sup>2</sup> If it is established at the beginning and made consistent, audiences will accept it and enjoy it, as they will the still more blunt asides of the Chinese characters in a play like *The Yellow Jacket*. In realistic plays the director should eliminate as many asides as possible; and when an aside is unavoidable he should have the actor ready in position down right or left to deliver it with a minimum of ostentation.

#### GRACE IN STAGE MOVEMENT

As far as possible, stage movement should be designed to be graceful in plan, this being especially important to those of the audience who sit in the balcony or gallery. In other words, the path taken by the actor should be graceful as seen from above.

This may seem inconsistent with the traditional rule about moving in

<sup>2</sup> See program note on *The School for Scandal* (Appendix, p. 401).



straight lines. A slightly curved line, especially a double curve, is more graceful and less studied than the straight line; and if there is much furniture on the stage it is often more practical. On the other hand, too much curve in the actor's path suggests too much concern about the movement itself and too little about the objective. A fair rule is to use straight movements for short distances and strong objectives, such as eager ap-

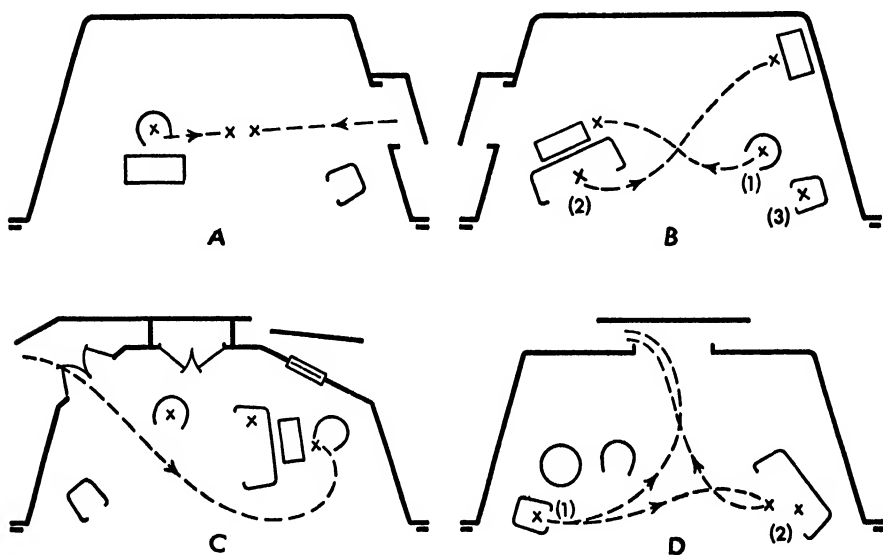


FIG. 12. GRACE OF PLAN IN STAGE MOVEMENT.

proach, determination, or haste (A, Fig. 12), and to use slightly curved movements over longer distances, or for less urgent objectives (B, Fig. 12), or for avoiding the furniture (C, Fig. 12). In any case, where a movement must necessarily be curved it is obviously better that a graceful rather than an ungraceful curve should be used. When a single movement cannot be made graceful in plan it can often be broken into two shorter and more graceful movements, with a line or a piece of business between them (D, Fig. 12).

Grace of plan is especially desirable in movements designed for a platform stage, because the third dimension plays a more important part on such a stage. The platform stage creates many special problems for the director in that movements and groupings must be so designed as to be effective as seen from three different directions, and in the case of the central or "Penthouse" stage from all four directions. No matter

which way the actor faces on a central stage, some members of his audience are always behind him. Deep apron and platform stages suffer in a lesser degree from the same limitation. In designing movements for three-dimensional stages the director must achieve great variety in the grouping, but he must not permit his actors to pivot constantly as they speak in a futile effort to reach all parts of the audience at all times. That is a trick of the orator, and goes with the direct sense of communication. In the actor it kills illusion.

The director must, of course, have considerable experience before he can expect to design movements on paper and have them work out on the stage satisfactorily. He should study closely the way in which they do work out at each new attempt, and should not be too loath, at first, to make changes in rehearsal. The very best directors make plenty of mistakes and plenty of corrections. But if the beginner will digest the underlying principles here suggested, and especially the various purposes of stage movement, and will analyze carefully the movements in as many professional productions as possible, he will soon cultivate at least a little of the right sort of sensitivity.



## *Stage Business*

WITH stage business, as with stage movement, the most important principle to observe is: None without a purpose.

### TYPES OF STAGE BUSINESS

Classifying stage business according to purpose, we find that many of the purposes are similar to those of stage movement, while some are slightly different. To mention again only the most important types, we have:

1. Business essential to the action of the play. This is ordinarily prescribed by the dramatist, and the director's task is not so much to invent it as to arrange and supervise it. As in the case of movement essential to the action it is, comparatively, a simple problem. Juliet taking the sleeping potion, Hamlet's duel with Laertes, Androcles removing the thorn from the lion's paw, the business with the mummy case in *The Man Who Came to Dinner*—all these are examples, if examples are needed.

2. Business for delineation of character or state of mind. This sort of business is especially rich in its possibilities, and so is often overworked. It is most legitimate when the delineation of character is essential to the action of the play. In *Mr. Pim Passes By*, for instance, the plot turns upon the old gentleman's absent-mindedness; when, therefore, he forgets his hat, comes back, and takes the wrong one, it is business for character delineation (as well as for humor) but it is also indirectly essential to the plot. When Penelope Sycamore stops pounding the typewriter and gets out her painting equipment, or when Mr. Day, in *Life With Father*, stamps on the floor to summon the cook, or when Shylock strops his knife on the sole of his boot, we have character delineation quite as important as the plot itself. Business for delineation of a state of mind may be equally important; that of Barrie's lovesick professor at the opening of *The Professor's Love Story* is a good example.

3. Business for background, atmosphere, or local color. Within reasonable limits this also may be made to enrich a play, but again its appropriateness depends upon the extent to which the background is itself important. The business of putting turf on the fire in plays of Irish peasant life is certainly legitimate, and is often suggested by the dramatist. The business of dodging snakes, bugs, and nameless things that "drop on one from above" in the second act of *The Admirable Crichton* is manifestly helpful to the atmosphere; so are the bits of business incidental to Christmas in *Junior Miss*, or those illustrating Chinese theatrical conventions in *The Yellow Jacket*. Sometimes it is the manner rather than the fact that is significant. In *Liliom*, for example, there is a loaf of bread to be cut; an American woman would lay it on the table and cut it downward, but the Hungarian holds it against her body and cuts it toward her. In *The Inspector-General* the characters cross themselves frequently—not from left to right as in the Roman Church but from right to left in Russian orthodox fashion.

4. Business for emphasis or illustration. Whenever a line, or movement, or character needs "pointing up" in some way for greater importance or greater clarity there is the possibility that a piece of business will do the trick. Pure gesture is the simplest form of business for this purpose, but more elaborate forms are common, as when Yank, in *The Hairy Ape*, emphasizes his curse by hurling a shovel at Mildred, or when Hamlet points up his lines about Yorick by handling the skull.

5. Business for control of attention. Of this, more in the next chapter.

6. Business for dramatic foreshadowing. The unobtrusive "planting" of ideas that are later to be built up dramatically is a device that every accomplished dramatist understands. Much of the foreshadowing is done in the lines; but occasionally, either because the dramatist prefers it so, or because he has overlooked the matter, the director or the actor must invent business for the purpose. In *The Beggar on Horseback* the distraught composer, just before the doctor gives him an opiate, sits absently toying with an ivory paper knife while he explains his troubles to the doctor. This is natural enough, and might be classed as business for delineation of character or state of mind; and it makes only a subconscious impression on the audience. But when in the fantastic dream that follows he slaughters his intolerable relatives-in-law with a huge replica of that same paper knife, the thing seems much more intelligible

and inevitable by reason of the "plant." A bit of business is often a better plant than a line. It is generally less obtrusive, for the reason that we accept the lines as representing the dramatist's conscious intention, while the business, if well done, seems casual; at the same time it is less apt to escape the attention of the audience than a line would be, because in the theatre the eye ordinarily misses fewer things than the ear.

7. Business for position. It often happens that a certain stage movement is desirable but lacks apparent motivation because the real reason for it cannot at the moment be disclosed. When the director of *Abraham Lincoln* wanted to keep the left half of the stage clear for Lincoln's entrance he had to find a reason for crowding the visiting neighbors at extreme stage right. He put the fireplace at stage right and had them warming their hands before it. In the dinner scene of *Erstwhile Susan* it is necessary for Barnabette to hear some parts of the conversation and not to hear others: since she is the drudge as well as the daughter of the house it is a simple matter to arrange the business of waiting on table so as to bring her on and take her off at the proper moments.

8. Business for rhythm. What was said with respect to movement for rhythm also applies here.

9. Business for humor. Humor is one of the motives for much of the best stage business—one of the motives, in fact, for the theatre itself. But outside of pure farce humor *alone* is a very risky purpose either for the dramatist or the director. Humorous business is artistic only when it combines the motive of humor with that of legitimate character delineation, or that of clarifying a line, situation, or state of mind—in other words, when it contributes to the main thought or feeling of the play without distracting the attention. Even the so-called "comic relief" in a serious play may be a source of distraction if it is forced or irrelevant. Humorous business is good theatre, but only when it is natural and appropriate to the meaning of the play—like the dart throwing of Grandpa Vanderhof in *You Can't Take It With You*, or the screen and closet business in *The School for Scandal*, or Bottom's business of handing the dagger to "Thisbe" in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The final scene of the latter play is perhaps the richest opportunity in theatrical history for legitimate comic business.

10. Business for naturalism or relief. Under the most favorable circumstances acting involves some measure of strain, rigidity, or self-

consciousness. Inexperienced actors have a tendency to seek relief from this in movement or business of some sort. Left to themselves they are apt to take it out in mere fidgeting, relieving themselves but not the audience. It is futile for the director to attempt to suppress this tendency by merely instructing the actors to keep still; but if he can divert their energy into useful channels by suggesting little bits of business, unobtrusive in themselves, and seemingly unimportant, but natural to the situations, he will not only ease the strain but will actually improve the play at the same time. When, for instance, an actor enters ostensibly from outdoors, he may be kept busy taking off his gloves and hanging up his hat, and so will have no time to fidget. When an actor accustomed to smoking cannot keep still on the stage, and smoking is not inappropriate to the scene, it may be better to let him smoke. It will keep his hands at least partly occupied and attract less attention than the fidgeting; moreover, if he is required to practice the smoking at rehearsals it will give him something to think about and relieve his sense of inaction, and when the first performance comes along he will experience that comfortable sense of knowing just what he is going to do. A woman who does not smoke may be permitted to knit or sew for a similar purpose; but nowadays more women than men seem painfully ill at ease without a cigarette.

#### COMBINING PURPOSES

With business, as with movement, it is well to combine the purposes as much as possible for economy of expression and unity of effect. It is also well to combine the purposes of the business with those of the movement, and both with the motives of the play itself. A piece of business that is necessary to the action, enriches the delineation of character, is humorous, excuses a movement of the character to a position where he will soon be needed, and at the same time improves the picture, is clearly an asset to the production.

The real importance of stage business, especially in modern plays, is not always fully understood. Properly managed, it adds verisimilitude, enriches the interest, and helps greatly in the rounding and polishing of the production. The less experienced the actors the more important the latter point becomes. Only the most finished actors can declaim lines convincingly without business, but even beginners can often perform business convincingly under competent direction; and beginners who have

difficulty in reading their lines usually find them easier to deliver when accompanied by appropriate business, well rehearsed. Ability to arrange good business will therefore count heavily when the director's problem is how to get a finished performance from unfinished actors.

At the same time it is obvious that stage business is interesting in its own right, and therefore a potent source of distraction if poorly conceived or overelaborated. A good deal of nonsense has been written about the "art that conceals art," but if there is any phase of art that needs such concealment it is the designing of stage business. A stirring or impassioned reading of a line may—the point is debatable—just happen. But good business does not just happen; it is carefully and intelligently designed, with consistency of motive and economy of means, and nothing is more important than to keep it within bounds.

It is neither necessary nor possible to arrange all the business of a modern play before the first rehearsal, but if time is short or if most of the players are inexperienced, it is wise to arrange as much as possible. Business that has to do with the larger movements and groupings of the characters and the major effects of the play can and should be arranged first. Business that calls for teamwork should be settled before the actors have had a chance to form very definite conceptions of their parts. Individual business connected with the enrichment of lines and character can be allowed to wait until rehearsals have begun, but even this should be fixed early enough to be learned with the lines.

#### AIDS TO INVENTION

With all proper regard to the danger of excessive stage business it remains a fact that most amateur performances suffer from too little rather than too much, and that the amateur director often finds himself at a loss how to devise suitable business. The following suggestions may help him to cultivate a little more fertility of invention in such matters:

1. Study the manners and customs of the people and time represented in the play. Remember, however, that the object is to produce a work of art, not a museum of antiquity. Art implies discrimination and selection.

2. Study out the costumes and make-ups in advance. Have the costumes (or adequate substitutes) on hand for trial as early in rehearsal

as possible, especially costumes that differ essentially from modern street dress. A Roman toga, a Turkish veil, or a military uniform may suggest business that would otherwise not suggest itself. It may also reveal when and where business is needed, especially business for naturalism, for an actor may seem perfectly easy at rehearsal with his hands in his pockets only to lose his poise when he finds himself in doublet and hose without any pockets.

3. Study the placing and use of properties, including "hand props." As with costumes, have the properties (or adequate substitutes) ready for use at an early rehearsal. The height or depth of a chair, the width of a davenport, the space available between a chair and a table, the length and weight of a cane, umbrella, or parasol, the position of a hat rack or telephone, the placing of a flower vase, ash tray, or matchbox—any of these considerations may suggest a piece of business or affect the character of one.

4. Make use of ordinary objects, especially in devising business for naturalism or relief. Consider the objects men carry or handle: Cigars, pipes, matches, tobacco, pencils, watches, fountain pens, notebooks, wallets, brief cases, suitcases, keys, canes, pocketknives, guns, swords, revolvers, whips, monocles, snuffboxes, and what not. Or those women handle: Fans, gloves, vanity cases, compacts, purses, handbags, parasols, shawls, scarfs, furs, sewing bags, needles, thimbles, scissors, knitting needles, lorgnettes—any woman can extend the list. Or consider the objects in more general use by both sexes: Books, papers, cigarettes, lighters, furniture (chairs to be moved, for instance), dishes, knives, forks, spoons, pen and ink, call bells, telephones, lamps, light switches, candles, pictures, hats, coats, wraps, handkerchiefs—and so on almost indefinitely.

5. Study real people, on trains and trolleys, in restaurants and stores, at church, in the theatre, at dances and parties, on the street, in their homes, and at their occupations. Note especially what they do with their hands, for an amateur actor needs more help on that point than almost any other.

6. Study bits of business on the professional stage. The best way to do this is to see the same play several times, and to note the care with which certain bits of business are timed and the precision with which they are repeated. Note also the skillful articulation of business with lines.



Never miss an opportunity to see two different companies in the same play, whether trained by the same director or not; the experience is highly instructive in either case, though in different ways.

7. Watch the natural movements of the actors in the early rehearsals. In many instances these will not be appropriate, but when they are, make use of them. For example, if a member of the cast sits down without being told, decide at once whether the action is appropriate. If not, rule it out; if so, establish it as part of the play, note it in the prompt book, and insist upon it at subsequent rehearsals. If a real change of interpretation later requires a change in the business, well and good; but do not allow the actors to keep changing their incidental business at every rehearsal for no reason at all.

8. Have a stage rehearsal as early as possible, and try to have a few friends present to suggest an audience. The behavior of the actors on the stage with even a small audience before them is astonishingly different from their behavior at a private rehearsal in somebody's home.

9. Do not hesitate to experiment in the early rehearsals. Try every possibility and see how it works out. But decide early, settle everything, and have the business learned with the lines. Make copious notes, and study the problems of business between rehearsals; ideas do not come just when they are wanted, and it is futile to hold up a rehearsal while you seek for an inspiration.

One of the most difficult problems for the amateur director is the articulation of lines with business, or business with lines. The amateur actor wants to speak his line first and then carry out the business, or vice versa, and cannot seem to manage the two things at once. The problem can finally be solved only in rehearsal, but in planning the business the director should have regard to the timing and cadence, and should not ask the actor to do impossible things.

For example, it may be appropriate in a certain scene to have an actor light a pipe. The director should time the business so that it does not create an awkward interruption of the dialogue, and so that the dialogue does not interfere with the business, causing the actor to bungle the latter. This piece of business is most effective when it seems to articulate with the line. The skillful actor fills his pipe as he talks, lights a match, finishes a sentence, lights the pipe, speaks another word or two while he throws the match away, and gets in a few more puffs in time to make

the pipe draw. The green actor (perhaps a confirmed smoker off stage) creates an awkward stage wait, tangles his words, burns his finger, and lets the pipe go out. American audiences are quick to note such bungling and are not tolerant of it.

Even more troublesome is the task of articulating the lines and business of a scene at the dinner table. If the actor fails to eat a reasonable quantity of food the audience notices it at once. If he eats continuously, he cannot speak his lines. If he takes a large mouthful he is almost sure to hear his cue before he can swallow, and there is either a stage wait or a strangulation scene. Unless the actors are very old and capable hands at it, a scene of this kind must be carefully timed by the director, and each bite of food considered as a separate bit of business to be prescribed, memorized, and rehearsed.

#### THE PRINCIPLE OF BALANCED FORCES

In relation to the problem of stage position and posture there is one very important principle which ought to be mentioned here because it often calls for invention of stage business. It is the principle of balanced forces, somewhat akin to the principle of resultant forces in physics. Most experienced professional actors make constant use of it, sometimes without analyzing or understanding it; but amateurs are not apt to make use of it at all unless the director is prepared to teach it to them.

To illustrate the principle: Suppose a character at stage left is to speak an important line following a cue from another character at stage right. If he faces the audience squarely (as in *A*, Fig. 13) the line will be pointed up, but the effect will be mechanical and declamatory. If he faces the other character (as in *B*) the effect will be natural enough, but he will be seen only in profile, and his voice will travel across the stage instead of toward the audience. Sometimes this will do no harm, as when the character is rather loud-mouthed and the line a bold or blunt one. But suppose in this case it is important to have the actor's full face seen as he speaks the line, or that the line is of such a nature that it ought to go straight out to the audience, yet with no suggestion of declamation. The solution is to give the character a bit of business at stage left—flicking the ashes from his cigarette into the fireplace, for example—and to time it so that he is pulled left by the business at the very moment when he is pulled right by the cue from the other character. The re-

sultant of these two forces is a force in the direction of the audience. In other words, with his body turned left to perform the business and his thoughts drawn right by the cue, his face is toward the audience (as in C, Fig. 13), yet the effect is perfectly natural. A slight inclination of the head toward the right helps to suggest the direction of his thoughts without forcing him to turn his face too far.

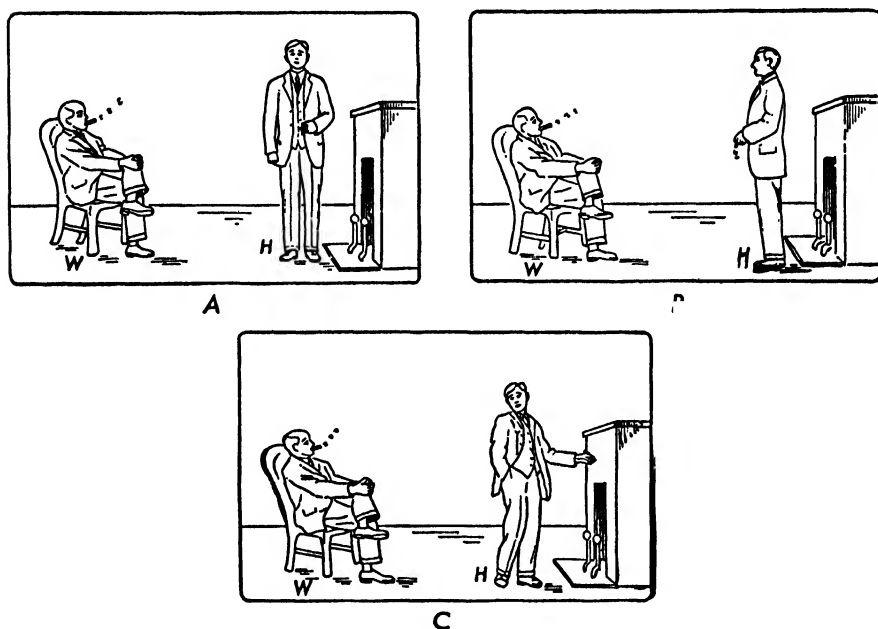


FIG. 13. BALANCED FORCES IN STAGE BUSINESS.

Trickery? Of course. But a reasonably intelligent amateur can learn to do a trick of this kind in six weeks, and to do it so naturally and at so little cost to his freedom of interpretation that the audience will hardly notice the device; whereas it may take him ten years to learn how to declaim a line straight toward the audience without seeming stiff and unnatural.

Among the types of business most often useful for balancing forces in this way are:

Lighting cigarettes, cigars, or pipes; getting rid of ashes; looking in a mirror and adjusting hair, hat, or tie; opening or closing a door; looking out a window; moving a chair or other object; examining a book or photograph; warming the hands at a fire; smelling flowers or rearranging

them; dusting or tidying; lighting lamps; pouring drinks; ringing for servants; reading books or newspapers, and writing letters.

#### SIMPLICITY IN STAGE BUSINESS

All this suggests, no doubt, a great deal of complication and a great danger of overemphasis. Simplicity is highly desirable in art, for complication is distraction. But simplicity does not mean *sterility*. The best simplicity is not that which results from a paucity of ideas, but that which is resolved by choice out of many possibilities; and one must often find his way through great complexities before he can simplify intelligently. The best stage business is simple, not because the director lacks experience or knowledge, but because from a wealth of ideas he has selected wisely.



## *Control of Attention*

THE problem of controlling the attention of the audience is one that must be studied throughout the period of rehearsal and even after performances have begun; but as certain aspects of it affect the planning of stage movement and business it may best be considered at this point. The problem is much more complex and much more important than the inexperienced director is apt to imagine.

### THE KINDS OF ATTENTION

Psychologists do not agree upon the nature of attention—or of consciousness—and they are hardly likely to agree as long as some believe the body to be a piece of soulless mechanism responding automatically to stimuli, while others believe it to be controlled through consciousness by an immaterial mind or soul. They do agree, however, upon a practical distinction between two types of attention, which they call “primary” and “secondary.”

Primary attention is the automatic or involuntary attention which we give to a strong external stimulus—a bright flash of light, for instance, or a loud noise, or a sudden slap on the back. The appeal is concrete; that is, it is more or less directly in terms of sense impressions, either real or suggested. Primary attention involves no sense of effort, no conscious intention, no exercise of will power.

Secondary attention is voluntary attention, the sort that one gives to a difficult problem through a sense of duty or by force of great concentration. Whether there is such a thing as real “will power” or not is of course the point in dispute, the mechanists holding that what we mistake for will power is but the reaction to the more remote stimuli in the past experience of the individual; but there is certainly a kind of attention in the giving of which we are aware of conscious effort.

## ATTENTION IN THE THEATRE

In the theatre very little dependence should be placed upon secondary or voluntary attention. The teacher or the preacher may conceivably have a right to expect his audience to attend by an effort of the will, but the actor has no such right. The problem in the theatre is how to gain, hold, and control primary or involuntary attention.

The conditions of the theatre make the first part of this—and to a certain extent the second part—easy. People come to the theatre expecting to be interested and entertained; they await eagerly the beginning of the play; the house lights go down, there is a sudden hush, the curtain rises, and out of the darkened auditorium they gaze in fascination upon the lighted stage. This is primary attention at its best, and if the circumstances are reasonably favorable it is likely to continue, simply because the concentration of sound and light on the stage acts as a powerful magnet, and tends to hold the audience spellbound.

There are always, however, two possible enemies to sustained attention, and either of these may operate in the theatre, if not to destroy attention at least to shift it or weaken it. One of them is distraction, and the other is monotony.

## OVERCOMING DISTRACTION

Distraction may be described as primary attention gone wrong; it is the shifting of primary attention caused by some external and irrelevant demand upon the senses.

The American theatre audience of today suffers from comparatively little distraction, especially distraction external to the performance. This may seem a very rash statement if one has recently been annoyed by the coughers or sneezers, or the people who rattle waxed paper, or carry on conversations, or push their feet into one's back, or the people who arrive late and depart early. But the word is *comparatively*. Things used to be much worse. Only a few decades ago audiences in this country expressed themselves freely by shouting, stamping, applauding, hissing, heckling, and sometimes by throwing eggs or vegetables, by quarreling and rioting, and even (in a few notorious cases like the Forrest-Macready feuds) by violence and bloodshed. As late as 1910, I remember seeing a

performance by the Abbey Theatre Players of *The Playboy of the Western World* with dozens of policemen stationed in the aisles to eject angry Irish-Americans as fast as they raised disturbances. Not all performances were so interrupted, nor are all performances free from interruption today; but distractions were common a few years ago which today would be almost unbelievable. And even today the European theatres tolerate demonstrations of approval or disapproval—especially the latter—for which a theatre-goer in the United States would be promptly put out, and perhaps arrested.

Even so, there is more distraction than there ought to be. Perhaps conditions will continue to improve as we become more civilized—if we ever do. Much of the responsibility for improvement in the theatre rests with the house manager, the theatre owner, or the theatre architect, rather than the director. If audiences cannot be educated to come on time they can certainly be refused admission while the curtain is up. Seats can be made more comfortable and spaced more generously, as in the Goodman Theatre at Chicago; house lights and decorations can be made less distracting, and theatre walls more nearly soundproof. As for those distractions which arise from the bad manners of the audience, the only solution would seem to be a law defining the slaughter of their perpetrators as a trifling misdemeanor instead of a crime.

Very little of this concerns the director. What does concern him, vitally, is that quite as many distractions may be caused by the faults of the production itself as by the defects of the house or the misbehavior of the audience. In *I Remember Mama* the distractions were not confined to the superfluous backdrop; the scenes themselves were so cluttered up with bric-a-brac to establish the atmosphere of Scandinavia and San Francisco (both at once and in competition, with grave doubts about the date) that one's mind constantly wandered from the play. There was further distraction in the use (for the most part unnecessary) of noisy revolving stages, operated in many cases during the action of the play—a distraction which also occurred in *The Eve of St. Mark*, the Margaret Webster *Tempest*, and many other productions, and which will be discussed later in relation to back-stage mechanics. A further distraction in *The Tempest* was provided by a Trinculo and a Stephano with what sounded like Yiddish accents; you had to read the newspaper to find out that you were being entertained by a world-famous team of Czech music-hall comedians

—whatever that has to do with Shakespeare. But even the newspaper did not explain why one of them wore a ghetto-style derby hat, which seemed curiously distracting on Prospero's magic island. The constant straining for novelty in New York productions leads to orgies of distraction such as the better community theatres are seldom guilty of. That some of the offending productions are interesting and successful despite their faults is beside the point.

The distractions caused by divided or broken scenes, unused exits, or misplaced empathic effects have already been mentioned. A piece of rickety scenery or property, a teaser hung too low or not low enough, a delay in the rise or fall of the curtain, a late entrance or other stage wait, an audible prompt, an uncovered light shining in the eyes of the audience, an actor "out of the picture," an illogical entrance or exit, an unexplained movement, a gratuitous piece of business, a forced joke or gag, an awkward gesture, a line spoken too softly or otherwise unintelligibly, a piece of overacting, a too conspicuous costume or property, a mirror facing the audience, an unnecessary clock or unused telephone, an unintentional noise back stage, a spotlight badly managed, a shadow in the wrong place—these are just a few of the possible causes of distraction that may be blamed on the director or the actors. There is only one way to combat them, and that is by constant vigilance. There must be careful planning, thorough rehearsal of both cast and stage crew, and the most rigorous censorship of every single element that might catch the primary attention of the audience and lead it astray.

#### OVERCOMING MONOTONY

The effect of monotony is less obvious than that of distraction. There is doubtless very little danger in the theatre of the droning humdrum which the word monotony ordinarily suggests, but there exists, in the theatre and elsewhere, a subtler sort of monotony which it is well for the director to understand.

The psychologists tell us, after due laboratory tests, that attention cannot be sustained for more than a few seconds at a time; that there is no such thing as continuous attention; that attention which seems continuous is really a succession of fresh perceptions, each the result of a fresh stimulus or a fresh effort of the will. They point out that fixation of attention is equivalent to destruction of attention; that complete concentra-



tion on a single, simple, unchanging element is the way to hypnosis or induced sleep. This very important fact is the explanation of why monotony is destructive of attention—not alone monotony of pitch, but monotony of force, tempo, rhythm, line, mass, color, or any other element of expression. If attention is to be held for any long period of time it must be renewed by a constant succession of fresh appeals to interest.

The director must realize, therefore, that in the attempt to hold attention and keep it fresh he is dealing with a psychological rather than a logical problem. He may know, for example, that a certain scene is of great intrinsic importance in the play, and may suppose therefore that it will prove interesting to the audience. But interest is not governed by intrinsic importance; it is governed by sense stimuli, and the most important scene in the play may fail utterly to hold attention if the effect upon the senses is either too weak or too continuous. There must be a succession of fresh appeals to the eye and ear, striking enough and varied enough to prevent either a relaxation or a too steady fixation of attention.

An audience that is familiar with a play, and fond of it, will contribute some measure of attention as a result of its previous knowledge—the sort of attention known to the psychologists as “derived primary” attention. An object that has little immediate sense appeal may, upon longer acquaintance, grow into the interests of the observer in such a way as to command what is virtually primary attention. A man who has made a hobby of science may take great interest in a formula which to the rest of us would prove quite unattractive. Similarly an audience familiar with Shakespeare may be keyed up with anticipation the moment Hamlet begins his soliloquy, or Mercutio his “Queen Mab” speech, and the task of holding attention may, at least for the moment, be easier.

There are many different ways of freshening the attention in the theatre, some depending upon the dramatist, some upon the director, and some upon the actors. The dramatist who knows his business is careful not to prolong a scene unduly, or use too slow a method of development; when there is danger of monotony he brings in a new character or a new phase of the plot. The capable director supplements this by movements of the characters, variations of the stage pictures, changes of tempo, shifts of emphasis, and injection of stage business. The actor contributes variety in action and delivery as well as business of his own invention; and

upon his power to gauge the attention of the audience and to strengthen his acting as needed depends much of the final success of each performance.

Among producers, nobody ever understood the problem of freshening attention better than the late Mr. David Belasco. In a Belasco production the attention was never allowed to lag for a moment; there was always some fresh movement, some shift of emphasis or change of pace, some play of light or color to keep the attention engaged. Mr. Belasco was often accused of overdoing it to the point of restlessness, or of failing to motivate sufficiently the devices employed, but he was never accused of monotony.

On the other hand many little-theatre and art-theatre groups have failed to hold the attention of popular audiences largely because they have not understood how to avoid monotony. Among such groups the commonest and worst form of this fault is simple "talkiness."

When the Abbey Theatre players of Dublin first visited this country they impressed two eminent teachers of dramatic literature in quite opposite ways. One praised highly their simplicity, naturalness, and freedom from artificiality; the other, while admitting the excellence of their diction, found them in other respects quite amateurish. The difference lay, no doubt, in the fact that the first, who was a specialist in Irish literature and already familiar with the plays, supplied not only a clearer understanding and a livelier imaginative interpretation, but also a keener "derived primary" attention. The second, a specialist in another field, had no such advance interest; he took the plays as actually presented, and was bored by the talkiness and uneventfulness of the performances. Fortunately the Abbey Players have learned with experience, and their more recent visits have been anything but amateurish; perhaps they have erred in the opposite direction.

The matter of audience interest and preparation is a major consideration in the control of attention. It is one thing to produce *Hamlet* before a well-established Shakespeare Society which has seen the play many times before, and quite another to produce it before an audience of high school students who are seeing a Shakespearean play for the first time. Whenever a new or otherwise unfamiliar play is produced the director can safely expect his audience to require constant freshening of interest.

Neither the intrinsic interest of the play itself nor the intellectual curiosity of the audience will quite solve the problem in the absence of the necessary sense stimuli.

It need hardly be said that amateur directors and actors should go as often as possible to observe the work of the best professionals—not for slavish imitation but for intelligent study. Many professionals are extraordinarily clever in freshening interest. They do it by means of variations in the pitch, force, and tempo of the voice; by the skillful use of pauses; by unexpected yet expressive movements; by good stage business; by good coordination of lines and action; but most of all by the suggestion of a lively play of imagination. The actor who can keep his own attention awake by avoiding a perfunctory, unimaginative attitude can usually keep the attention of his audience awake also; and the director who can teach his actors to play imaginatively has most of what it takes to be a good director.

#### INSURING THE POINTS OF THE PLAY

Another problem of attention arises from the fact that in nearly every play there are certain lines or bits of action so important in conveying the meaning that the audience simply cannot be allowed to miss them. The dramatist points these things up as best he can, and when the plot permits he repeats important ideas several times to make sure that they are heard and understood. But sometimes the plot does not permit. An essential point may be of such a nature that it can be given only once, and the play may be spoiled for anybody who misses it. What sort of insurance will enable the director to guard against such contingencies?

The temptation, of course, is to have the actor shout the important line; but that is always painfully artificial and often leads to false accent. Sometimes a very slight increase of voice is allowable; at other times the situation may preclude even that, as when one character is supposed to speak the important line confidentially to another in fear of being overheard.

A more practicable plan is to arrange the business and movement, the stage picture, the lighting, and the contrasts of voice, in such a way as to concentrate the maximum attention on the right character at the instant he is to deliver the important line. This will not prevent external distraction, of course; somebody may cough or sneeze just as the line is

uttered. But the more powerful the concentration of attention at the instant, the greater the resistance to distraction, even on the part of the coughers and sneezers themselves; and if a listener does miss the line that is so pointed up, he realizes that he has missed something important and so tries harder to pick up the context.

An essential line should always be expressed in easy familiar words with strong vowel contrasts; such a line is less apt to be missed than a line couched in unfamiliar words, or words not easily distinguishable in sound. Unfamiliar proper nouns are the most troublesome of all, and more apt to be misunderstood than any other class of words. While this is undoubtedly the dramatist's business rather than the director's, a good director can often repair some of the damage done by a dramatist unfamiliar with the realities of production.

Clear enunciation is naturally a great asset in conveying the points of a play to the audience—not only in its effect on the ear but in its effect on the eye as well. Most people nowadays do a little lip reading, and those who are at all hard of hearing do a great deal, so that if an actor faces front as he speaks an important line and makes his lip movements distinct, many listeners will catch the line as much with the eye as with the ear. Gesture helps in the same way; many dramatists and stage directors today are finding it safer to entrust important thoughts to pantomime than to express them in words—partly because the public, in spite of the radio, is still predominantly visual-minded, and partly because the eye is not so easily distracted as the ear in a darkened auditorium. Safer still is a combination of both, for it is an unusually violent distraction that causes one to miss an entire line and also the accompanying action; and if one gets a part of the thought and the contributing conditions are helpful he can often piece out the rest. The director's concern is to make the contributing conditions as helpful as possible, without obtrusive overemphasis.

All of this is ridiculously obvious when one stops to think of it. But how often does an amateur director sit down before the first rehearsal, check over the essential points of the play, and plan a constructive campaign to get those points to the audience even at the sacrifice of minor effects? More often, perhaps, an otherwise good performance is ruined by the practical failure of one important line, when so trifling a thing as a well-planned movement or a well-timed pause might have saved it. In

Frederick Lonsdale's *Aren't We All?* the very last line is the key to the title. In Cyril Maude's production that line was beautifully pointed up; but in another production I saw later it was spoken so casually as to miss fire completely, and the final curtain fell flat.

#### DIRECTING ATTENTION

The necessities of a production often require that the attention of the audience be controlled and directed not merely to the stage but to some particular spot on the stage, or that it be shifted at a given moment from one spot to another. For the accomplishment of this it is possible to devise a more or less complete technique, just a few points of which may be suggested here.

The first step is naturally to consider the various elements in play production, and to study their relative effect in attracting or repelling attention. For example, it will be found that attention generally tends to fall on:

1. People, rather than inanimate things.
  2. Speaking persons, rather than silent ones.
  3. Moving persons, rather than still ones.
  4. Light places, rather than dark ones.
  5. Bright colors, rather than dull ones.
  6. Converging, rather than diverging, lines.
  7. Near objects, rather than far ones.
  8. Stage center, rather than stage right or left.
  9. Objects at which the characters seem to be looking, rather than objects they seem to ignore.
  10. An advancing, rather than a retreating, character.
  11. A character in a state of emotion, rather than one in a tranquil state of mind.
  12. A character framed in a doorway or holding a striking pose, rather than one casually or inconspicuously placed.
  13. A character on a stairway or other high level, rather than one on the ordinary stage level.
  14. A character who is being talked about by other characters.
  15. A thing that is being talked about, if visible.
  16. An unusual element of any kind, rather than a commonplace one.
- These are mere suggestions; the catalogue might be continued almost

indefinitely. There will be plenty of exceptions, of course—as when a single silent character draws attention away from many talkative ones, or when a single dull costume stands out by contrast with many brilliant ones—but if one understands the principle of primary attention these exceptions will explain themselves.

In the final scene of Gogol's *The Inspector-General*, just before the startling denouement (Plate 15), all attention is concentrated on the governor (c.) who is questioning the postmaster (1). As the glittering gendarme enters (UP R.) and speaks, attention is irresistibly shifted to him by a combination of elements in the above list—numbers 2, 3, 6, 9, 10, 12, and 16. As he finishes his alarming message and vanishes, attention is held to the empty doorway for about three seconds (by number 9), then suddenly shifted to the famous tableau scene as the curtain comes down.

The extent to which it is possible to control and direct attention is perhaps best illustrated by the sleight-of-hand artist. Half the secret of his magic lies in his ability to direct the attention of the audience to the wrong place. By talking glibly and looking with great apparent interest at his right hand he practically compels his audience to look at that hand, while he performs the essential part of the trick with his left hand and nobody sees him do it. A good modern magician like John Mulholland, Harry Blackstone, or Paul Fleming employs for this purpose not only the devices of the actor—speech, gesture, and facial expression—but those of the stage director as well, including position, movement, business, line, mass, scenic effect, light, and shadow. The student of stage directing who is not too sternly opposed to trickery may learn from such performers a great many facts about the psychology of attention that will prove valuable in actual play production.

Perhaps the most important trick for the ordinary stage director to know is the simple physical one of leading the eye to the right place at the right time. This is so common that almost any well-directed play will furnish an illustration; but let us take a particularly striking one from *The Bat*. In one scene of that play—extremely popular in the twenties and often revived by stock and amateur groups—a bloody arm is thrust into view through a broken window pane, and the hand unfastens the catch. For full effect it is necessary that every person in the audience shall see that arm the instant it appears. The arrangement is

roughly that shown in Fig. 14, with window up L.C. and the broken pane at P. It is night, and pitch-dark outside, and a number of previous incidents have made everybody feel that some awful danger lurks in the garden, threatening the lives of the inmates. Miss Dale Ogden, the ingenue, has just been left alone, standing near the hall door up stage right, with the attention of the audience concentrated upon her. Should the mysterious arm appear just then not one person in twenty would see it, and the effect would be lost. But Miss Ogden, apparently fearing an

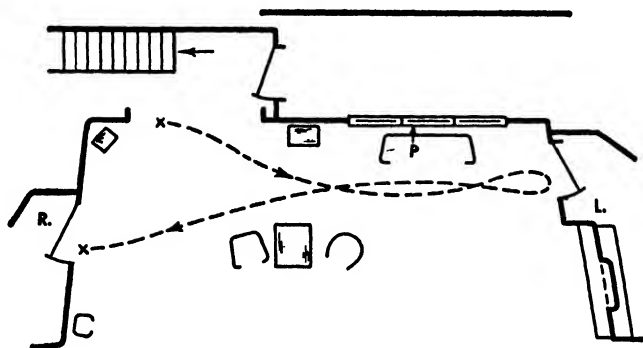


FIG. 14. A STUDY IN LEADING THE EYE.

attack from almost any direction, crosses timidly to the door up left, listens there for an instant, then, half reassured, crosses back as if to listen at the door down right—all of this being natural enough under the circumstances. Of course all eyes follow her, and at the very instant when she passes the point P on the return trip the arm comes through, catching every eye in the house and drawing a panicky scream from the ladies.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps this one example is sufficient to illustrate the device. There is hardly a play in which some use cannot be made of it, and in some plays important scenes may miss fire completely unless it is skillfully employed.

Another device, equally useful in controlling and directing attention, is that of anticipation—a device employed by both the dramatist and the director in a great variety of ways, some of which have already been discussed in connection with stage movement. Whether the anticipation is created by the lines of the play, by an expectant vacancy in the stage

<sup>1</sup> At least that is what should happen—and did happen in three of the four companies I saw during the original professional run, and in several amateur performances I have seen since. But in a professional performance in Chicago the arm appeared about two seconds late, and at least half the effectiveness was lost.

picture, by the gestures or facial expressions of the actors, or by dramatic foreshadowing, it is one of the greatest possible incentives to attention; and properly understood it is one of the easiest devices to manage. No more need be said of it here.

No amount of theorizing will teach the inexperienced director to control and direct attention unless it is backed by constant study and observation on his part. He should consider again and again the importance of the negative element in technique, and should be as anxious to avoid those things which distract or destroy attention as to create those things which gain and hold it. And always he should beware of excessive and artificial straining for attention—which is itself a cause of distraction. He should control attention, but he should not get caught at it.





## CHAPTER X



### *Choosing the Cast*

BEFORE the play can be put into rehearsal it is necessary of course to choose the cast—tentatively, at least. Sometimes the director has no option in this matter, the cast being chosen before the play is put in his hands. More often he either aids in the choice or bears the entire responsibility himself.

The first question that arises is whether the choice is to be made solely in the interest of the particular production, or partly in the interest of the organization and its future welfare. In the commercial theatre a production is ordinarily an independent venture, and the producer endeavors to secure the best possible cast to fit the characters—or to shine as stars—regardless of any permanent organization. As a result what is known as “type casting” has come to be the general rule in the commercial theatre; an actor is chosen primarily because he is already identified with the type of part to be filled. But in an amateur or little-theatre group, or in a real repertory theatre, it is often necessary to consider the training of a permanent company and the building up of an organization as well as the needs of the particular play.

One thing should be emphasized from the beginning, however, and that is the utter futility of sacrificing the quality of the production for the sake of training the actors. Such a procedure defeats its own purpose, for nothing is more injurious to the training of an actor than a half-hearted production, or a feeling that the production doesn’t matter very much as long as some other end is achieved; and nothing is more injurious to a sound *esprit de corps* than the toleration of inferiority. Considerations of permanent policy, therefore, should never be allowed to outweigh the needs of the particular play to the extent of spoiling the performance. If the demands of a later production preclude the choice of a good cast for an early one, the only sound procedure, artistically, is to omit the early one altogether, or to substitute a play that can be cast

without prejudice to the later ones. If to give the actors variety of experience it is necessary to miscast them badly, the exercise should be confined to rehearsals or classroom practice, and both actors and audience should be spared the pain of an inferior public performance.

However, without serious detriment to the excellence of any one production, it is quite possible to establish certain general policies in casting that are permanently beneficial to the actors and to the organization; and a few of these may be mentioned.

#### TYPE CASTING VERSUS MISCASTING

The most important point is to steer a middle course between type casting and miscasting. To choose an actor to represent a character because he seems to be that character himself, or because he has specialized in that type of character, is perhaps to gain a temporary advantage in making the play convincing. But if this method of casting is continued as a permanent policy the actors soon fall into ruts, become identified with their particular types, develop mannerisms, and fail to grow in imagination and sympathy. Meanwhile the audience, if a permanent one, learns to identify each actor by his mannerisms, to regard him always as the same character in a new situation, and to look upon each new play as a mere rearrangement of the old familiar types—very much as the small boy considers each new photoplay starring his favorite screen actor not a new story about new characters but a mere continuation of the adventures of his hero. Neighborhood audiences very quickly develop such an attitude toward the actors of a local stock company, and while the result may be a fairly healthy spirit of play it is not likely to encourage a very high order of art.

On the other hand, if actors are chosen arbitrarily and needlessly for parts totally beyond their range, the result may be ruinous to the quality of the performances, and eventually to the morale of the group and the interest of the audience. It is a very good thing for the actor to try his skill at a variety of parts within reasonable limitations, but it should be obvious that some actors are physically or temperamentally unfit for some parts, and if they are cast for such parts they can meet only with failure and discouragement.

The Moscow Art Theatre has traditionally steered the middle course. In that theatre the actors are cast for varied roles, and several different

actors are cast in rotation for the same role; yet no actor is assigned to a part for which he is seriously unfitted. The best feature of this system is that it educates the actors, but it is almost equally advantageous in its effect upon the audience, as emphasizing the play and the character rather than the personality of the actor.

Within limitations, the rotation of parts is one of the chief merits of the repertory system—of which the Moscow Art Theatre is neither the sole, nor the first, example. That system prevailed in most of the old-time “stock companies” of the United States. In the famous Arch Street Theatre of Philadelphia, for example, between 1850 and 1860, a favorite billing was *Othello*, given on two successive nights with John Dolman (my grandfather) and E. L. Davenport alternating as Othello and Iago. Many people would come both nights, for the audiences of that day loved to discuss the merits of differing interpretations. In such cases, however, it was generally assumed that both actors were good in both parts, if in different ways. This was neither miscasting nor type casting.

#### CASTING FOR TEAMWORK

A second important point is that good teamwork has more to do with training the actors and building up a strong group than has emphasis on individual talent. From the standpoint of permanent policy, therefore, it is not always best to choose the actors who show the most obvious virtuosity. It is better to choose those who show the most intelligent sense of cooperation with the director and the other actors. As a matter of fact this type of actor frequently gives the better performance in the end, even considered as an individual, though his superiority is not so noticeable in the early rehearsals.

In other words, if there are four candidates for two parts it is better to take the pair who are not brilliant but who work well together than to take the brilliant ones who work at cross-purposes. In this connection physical fitness is a consideration, of course; one does not want a heroine who is a head and a half taller than the hero, even if they are individually the best actors. Compatibility is another consideration; experienced professionals may act smoothly together though sworn enemies in private life, but amateurs can seldom do so. It is better to sacrifice a little talent than to allow a constant element of friction to disrupt the teamwork.

An important element of teamwork is leadership, and in choosing the

cast of a play it is wise to assign actors of experience and tried ability to those parts which involve leadership. However, it is not always the so-called "leading" parts—those of the hero and heroine—that carry the greatest responsibility. Often there are other parts, long and exacting, if less conspicuous or attractive, which have more to do with sustaining the play. A thoroughly dependable actor in such a part will do much to steady the performance, and will exercise a most beneficial influence on the less experienced members of the cast; an untrustworthy actor, on the other hand, even though talented, will ruin the whole performance. Unfortunately, he may also carry off the individual honors, for the audience will note his flashes of good acting and at the same time fail to discern that it is he who is upsetting the others; and they will blame the raggedness of the performance on almost anybody else—which is most exasperating to the director and unfair to the other actors.

When the actors are all young, as in a school or college production, it is usually much easier to cast the juvenile parts than those of old or middle-aged persons. Occasionally a young man, aided by a broad character make-up, can play very acceptably the part of an extremely old man; less often, but for the same reasons, a young girl can play an old woman. But it is usually the hardest thing in the world for a young person of either sex to play a middle-aged part convincingly. The youngster's face, voice, and movements are too youthful, yet he dare not indulge in elaborate make-up and he cannot change his voice without becoming painfully unnatural. It is advisable, therefore, to cast the middle-aged parts first, using the most capable actors for the purpose, even though the younger parts suffer somewhat in consequence. It often happens, fortunately, that the middle-aged parts are also the sustaining parts of the play, so that these last two problems merge into one.

#### CASTING THE SMALL PARTS

While the most difficult and most responsible parts should always be given to capable actors, the members of the group should never be allowed to regard the small parts as unimportant—mere leftovers to be parceled out among the defeated candidates as consolation. Such a feeling is bad for the production as well as for the spirit of the organization.

Every actor should be made to feel that a brief part is just as essential to the play and just as worthy an object of study as a long one, and that

it affords him just as fine an opportunity for good acting and good teamwork. One way of encouraging this feeling is to assign experienced players to small parts every now and then when they are not otherwise engaged, impressing upon them the dignity of doing a small thing well, and the importance of subordinating the individual to the ensemble effect. In the Moscow Art Theatre—if the reader will pardon another reference to that exemplary organization—even the smallest “bits” are carefully cast, and played with the utmost attention to detail. In *The Three Sisters* there is a serving woman who never speaks a word and does nothing but answer the doorbell; but even on tour in this country that part was played by a painstaking actress who made it a finished character study. Stanislavsky himself was not above playing a supernumerary part when he did not happen to be cast for a main one, and by so doing he encouraged the subordinate members of the company to sink their individual pride and consider only the good of the play. Many a little theatre in this country and elsewhere has framed upon its green-room wall the memorable words of Stanislavsky: “There are no small parts; only small actors.”

#### FAIRNESS IN CASTING

The loyalty and good sportsmanship of a producing organization depend in no small measure upon the feeling that the casting is being done wisely and fairly.

It is a bad plan to give the impression that talent is being overlooked or neglected, but it is even worse to push the merely talented members forward too easily and too rapidly. Service, experience, and reliability should be considered first. When important parts are hastily assigned to comparatively inexperienced players because they have displayed some flash of brilliancy, jealousies are quick to arise among those who think themselves equally brilliant; at the same time less brilliant members are apt to feel the hopelessness of competition and lose heart. Nobody likes to be given a minor part in support of an irresponsible young upstart. On the other hand most people who are at all seriously interested are glad to play in support of an experienced and reliable old-timer. They know they can depend upon him, that he has won his place by hard work, and that they can learn from him what is most likely to help them in

their own efforts. The result of such casting is a spirit of loyalty and cooperation very desirable in a permanent organization.

#### THE NEEDS OF THE PLAY

Granted that the needs and policies of the organization are taken care of, there still remains the problem of casting the particular play as effectively as possible.

The question most often asked in regard to casting is whether ability or suitability should be considered more important as determining the fitness of a candidate. The answer would seem to be fairly obvious: A certain degree of suitability is a necessary requirement, but beyond that requirement, ability rather than suitability should determine the choice.

The first test, then, to apply to a candidate for a part is that of minimum suitability. Is he physically possible in the part? In considering this question one naturally makes allowance for the possibilities of disguise, especially disguise of the face through make-up. There are some things, however, that even make-up cannot do. It can make an average face seem a bit narrow or a bit broad, but it cannot make a very broad face seem narrow, or vice versa. It cannot change greatly the facial angle so important in profile—not unless the part allows a copious application of whiskers. It can make a character face out of a straight juvenile, but it cannot make a straight juvenile face or a straight middle-aged face out of a character face. In a small theatre a heavy make-up is apt to be too obvious, and so to weaken the illusion; and in a play calling for subtleties of facial expression a heavy make-up is a serious detriment anyhow. It is not well, therefore, to put too much dependence upon the possibilities of make-up, or to disregard in casting the facial characteristics of the candidate.

Another consideration is bodily physique. The six-footer obviously cannot play Napoleon, the short fat man cannot play Abraham Lincoln, and the lady who weighs four hundred pounds cannot play the heroine—historical precedents notwithstanding. Little can be done to disguise such physical extremes. Even lesser peculiarities of build, proportion, carriage, and gesture are difficult to disguise, especially in the case of the women. Modern styles may permit a woman to conceal the facts about her complexion, but not about her architectural idiosyncrasies. Time

was when a bow-legged actress could play the lovely heroine, but not so today. A grasshopper build, pigeon-toes or knock-knees, even an absence of curves where the style of the moment says that the curves should be, will now disqualify an otherwise talented actress for anything but a character part; and if there is any part in the play which calls for a particular physique a candidate must be found who can satisfy the requirement.

Even more important than face and figure for certain parts is a suitable voice. Some voices are flexible and adaptable to many different characterizations, but most voices, especially young voices, have definite limitations which make them totally unfit for some parts. Voices can be trained, and flexibility can be cultivated, but the time required is a matter of months and years. For the sake of the play, therefore, the director must often reject at once the candidate whose voice is inappropriate and who cannot change it sufficiently in six weeks to make it right.

#### PROBLEMS OF EMPATHY

Given a candidate who has the physical equipment for a part, the next question is: Will he, or she, create the proper empathic effect upon the audience? This is not always easy to determine in advance, and sometimes the director is badly fooled. An actor who seems warmly human in real life may stiffen up on the stage, becoming cold and mechanical. On the other hand, a dowdy frump of a girl who would be described by a smart writer as having "no sex appeal" may sometimes make up to look positively alluring on the stage, and, conscious of the effect she is producing, develop a magnetic stage personality and a freedom in emotional acting which nobody could have supposed possible. I have seen this happen in startling fashion on several occasions. Stage personality is simply not the same thing as social personality. Many of our loveliest stage actresses are rather unimpressive, even mousy persons off stage, and a few are actually homely. So the wise director will not judge empathic effect except in terms of actual projection over the footlights.

As pointed out in an earlier chapter, there are two questions of empathy to be considered in casting: the effect of the actor upon those who are to empathize in him directly—especially those of his own sex—and the effect upon those who may empathize in some other character with whom he is involved. Since it is almost impossible for a man to judge

how the women in the audience will respond, or vice versa, it is a good plan for the director to consider the problem in consultation with somebody of the opposite sex. Two heads may or may not be better than one, but two sets of motor nerves are certainly better than one when the problem is to prophesy motor responses; and a half-dozen sets may be better than two, especially if they represent both sexes and several different ages and temperaments. At best the prophecy is uncertain, and for this reason, as for many others, the director should avoid too hasty decisions in casting.

Another question is whether the candidate has the sympathy and imagination necessary to a full appreciation of the part. Possession of these qualities is, to be sure, no proof of a good actor, but absence of them is pretty good proof of a bad one. Without the power to put himself mentally in the character's place, to imagine his sensations and emotions, and to sympathize with them even though they are entirely different from his own, an actor can hardly expect to interpret a part successfully. Fortunately for the casting director, these qualities are not so difficult to judge, provided the method of trying out the candidate gives him opportunity to reveal them to the director. An intimate, informal talk about the character will usually afford such an opportunity.

Another qualification which some directors demand in a candidate is intelligence, a reasonable amount of which would seem to be at least desirable. Whether a very high order of intelligence properly belongs to the art of acting is a question long in dispute; there are those who believe that a good memory, a fine voice, a responsive body, and a strong emotional temperament are much more to the point, and the history of the stage bears them out in some measure. But the teamwork and co-operation required in a modern production, and the cooperative spirit of a modern producing organization certainly call for intelligence. It is doubtless still true that the reaction of the audience is largely emotional rather than intellectual, but it is becoming increasingly necessary under modern conditions for the actor to have intelligence himself if he would create the right emotions in others. The more sophisticated our audiences become, the more intelligence the actor needs to enable him to penetrate their intellectual armor and touch their real emotions.

Perhaps the least important quality to look for in a new and inexperienced candidate, though one of the easiest to test, is technical ex-



cellence. Not that technique is unimportant in the finished production; but a new candidate should not be expected to have it ready made. A candidate who professes to have had considerable experience should of course be judged a little more severely in the matter of technique. On the other hand a player who shows a facile but superficial technical skill without much background of understanding, sympathy, and imagination is not usually a person of very good promise. The indications are that he has been over-trained and under-educated, or that he lacks balance. What the director must find out is not how well the candidate knows the traditional conventions, but how well he can adapt himself to whatever conventions may be called for by each new play. This of course is technique, in the broadest sense, but it is not what many old actors mean by technique.

#### THE TRYOUT SYSTEM

Some sort of tryout system is often necessary to assist the director in choosing the cast, and is often desirable from the standpoint of competition and morale in the producing organization. It should be understood, however, that such a system is at best a mere makeshift, dictated by policy or necessity.

There is no director on earth who can really tell in one tryout, or half a dozen, what an actor has in him. Only the test of actual performance—of many performances in many parts—can reveal that. It may be true that Belasco picked a schoolgirl and made her a star, or that Reinhardt chose an unknown woman to play the Nun in *The Miracle* because he liked her profile in the moonlight, but for every such case in which the judgment proved correct a dozen could be cited in which equally experienced producers went wrong. One has but to read the biographies of famous actors, past and present, to be impressed with the fact that many of them were themselves misjudged in youth, and had to go through long years of apprenticeship and even failure before their talents were recognized. Sarah Siddons not only was scorned by the managers but was hissed off the stage by the audience in London, to return after years in the provinces as the most popular actress England has ever known. Henry Irving was laughed at for his mannerisms long before anybody began to take him seriously. Many great actors, too, have been utterly different in rehearsal and in performance; Clara Morris,

for example, though she often tried, could never give any impression at rehearsal of what she would be before an audience, and was often misjudged in consequence, even by so astute a manager as Augustin Daly. There is only one thing harder to foretell than the future development of an actor, and that is the success or failure of a play. And if commercial managers cannot judge correctly among actors who have had, as a rule, at least some experience, the director of amateurs should have little faith in any judgment he can form on the basis of two or three tryouts.

But to say that is not to solve the problem. When the director has a play to cast and most of the candidates are strangers to him he cannot wait several years to find out what they can do. He must go ahead and choose, as wisely as possible, without hope of infallibility, but with the determination to reduce the probability of error to a minimum.

How, then, can a series of tryouts be planned so as to come as near the truth as possible in the time available? Among the many methods now in use, which are most genuinely helpful?

The commonest method—and the worst—is to have the candidates read at sight the parts for which they are competing, and to pass judgment upon the reading alone. This is, to be sure, the quickest way to eliminate a large number of candidates. But the best sight reading, or at any rate the most spectacular, is usually done by the superficially clever elocutionist. With a facility born of much practice and some egotism, he—or she—can give almost any part a lively and “expressive” reading which may or may not be correct, but which positively shines by contrast with the more cautious reading of the careful, modest actor. It frequently happens that the person who puts a great deal of expression into the first reading of a part overacts it seriously at a later period, and because he forms his conceptions so quickly he forms some misconceptions that are later hard to break. Many of the most capable and finished actors form their conceptions slowly and read very poorly at first, giving little evidence of interpretation until they have gone far enough to lay aside their books. To eliminate such persons at the first tryout would be most unfortunate. So deceptive, generally, is a judgment based upon a first reading that if I were compelled to choose a cast by that method I should almost think it safer to reject the good readers and retain the poor ones.

A far better method is the one occasionally used in amateur casting,

and sometimes in professional, by which each candidate is required to perform a scene from some play in which he has previously appeared, or a scene especially chosen in advance and rehearsed for the purpose. If the candidate has sufficient notice and some idea of the kind of play and the kind of part for which he is being considered, he can choose a scene that will demonstrate his abilities in appropriate manner. Still better is an elaboration of this method by which the candidate appears in several scenes from several different types of plays.

It is possible, of course, to use actual scenes from the play to be produced, and a great many directors do this. But scenes so used are apt to become tiresome to the actors before the real rehearsals have begun, and the total period of rehearsal is apt to seem painfully long and dragged out. Another difficulty is that some of the candidates will have learned these scenes without proper direction, and will have to make too many readjustments in rehearsal.

On the whole, it is generally better to keep the tryouts separate from the play itself, giving out the parts only after the cast has been finally chosen. When the competition is very keen, or when the candidates are serious-minded students eager for every scrap of coaching or instruction, it is possible to keep them working on the play for some time with no certainty of making the cast; but with the average group of amateurs it is easier to maintain the competitive spirit through a series of tests distinct from rehearsals. Most young candidates will work hard enough on preliminary tryouts, but they have a strange aversion to doing any real work on the play until they are sure of their parts.

The problem, then, is not so much how to conduct a series of trial rehearsals as how to devise a series of independent tests that will make possible the tentative choice of a cast, or at least the elimination of impossible candidates. Obviously no single recipe will do for all productions; plays and parts are so different in their requirements that the director must be prepared to meet each new occasion, changing his plan much or little according to circumstances.

#### TRYOUT METHODS

By way of illustration, suppose we are to produce a play of *Barrie—The Admirable Crichton*, for example. Here is a play about the family of an English earl. It has the humor and whimsy of *Barrie*, plenty of

comedy, a little romance, a little pathos, and a great deal of satirical "kick." Clearly we shall have to eliminate—at least as far as the principal parts are concerned—those candidates who are too uncouth in speech or manners to suggest the English peerage, even satirically; or too persistently American in speech to play English parts; or too naïve to appreciate the values in satire. We shall need some, or all, of the following tests:

1. A reading test for pronunciation and enunciation.
2. A conversation test to supplement the reading test.
3. An improvisation test for diction, manners, poise, and imagination.
4. A pantomime test for poise, carriage, technique, and imagination.
5. A test for satirical feeling.
6. A general acting test for all-round acting ability.
7. A personal interview, for character, intelligence, and sympathy, and to supplement all other tests. This may well be given first; or it may be given in two parts, before and after the other tests.

For the reading test the candidate may be asked to read at sight from several different scenes, taken perhaps from another play of Barrie, such as *Dear Brutus*. The material may be varied for different candidates according to their apparent possibilities, but the attention should be upon speech habits rather than character interpretation. The director should note any slovenliness of enunciation or any markedly un-English pronunciation, giving special attention to the long and short *o*, the *a* as in "laugh," "half," and "past," the medial and final *r*, and the more difficult labial and dental consonants, especially *b*, *t*, and *d*. In the word "Crichton," for example (pronounced as if it were spelled "Cry-ton"), the Englishman explodes the *t* as if it were a *ɾ*, while the American is apt to swallow it with a slight cough through the nose. Failure to achieve a perfect English pronunciation on the first reading should not necessarily mean summary dismissal, for a candidate may be very distinctly American in his ordinary speech and yet have the gift of learning dialects other than his own. The director should criticize the first reading, allow a little time for preparation, and then hear the same candidate again. If, after several chances, with criticism and time for preparation, the candidate still displays extreme uncouthness of speech—bad grammar, slovenly enunciation, vulgar intonation, coarse voice, or roughness of any kind, matters which are too serious to be corrected in a few weeks

—he may be promptly disqualified for anything but a supernumerary part.

The conversational test is a useful check on the reading test because there are some people who can read fairly well in a schoolroom manner but who revert to Brooklyn or Main Street English in conversation. Such persons are not usually to be trusted in sustained parts requiring cultivated speech; they are apt to exaggerate the cultivation when they think of it, and forget all about it when the excitement of acting is upon them. The director should draw the candidate out in conversation, putting him as much at ease as possible, but noting carefully his speech habits. There are matters of tempo, intonation, and sentence rhythm that are not revealed in the reading test, for the reason that reading has certain conventionalized inflections of its own; but most of these come out in conversation. Some candidates who can correct their pronunciation and clean up their enunciation are unable to catch the *tune* of English speech as distinct from American. And it is the sentence tune, even more than the vowel quality, that conveys the best suggestion of a British atmosphere.

The improvisation test is hardly a fair test of speech if used alone, because of the added element of self-consciousness, but it does help to reveal the relation of the candidate's speech habits to his manners and carriage. At the same time it tests the imagination much more severely than an ordinary acting test. The candidate may be asked to enter an imaginary drawing room, acknowledge the greetings of guests, place a chair for a lady, retrieve a lady's handkerchief and return it to her, perform an introduction, acknowledge an introduction, give an order to a servant, or what not, improvising his own lines as he goes. Or he may have a more definite and significant dramatic situation described to him, and be asked to enact his part of it, again improvising the words. As a rule it is best to apply this test to several candidates at once, assigning them to the several parts involved. After a group of candidates have floundered through an improvised scene once or twice they should be given a few moments to think it over and then be heard again, for unless they are actors of considerable experience they will not do very well on the first attempt and the test will seem a hopeless failure. After two or three trials and a little coaching they will begin to loosen up enough to reveal to the director what he wants to know about them.

The pantomime test is almost identical in method and purpose, except

that the emphasis is now on the action rather than the lines. The two tests may, of course, be combined, but I have generally found that I can learn more about a candidate's carriage, poise, manners, and action technique by putting him through a few scenes entirely in pantomime. If he does not have to search for words he can concentrate his imagination on the action. The director may describe to him a simple situation: He enters a drawing room; tea is being served; he sees Lady Clara on a divan at stage left; he greets her and expresses his pleasure at seeing her again; he asks if she had tea; she has not; he gets it for her; he asks permission to present a friend who is in the next room, and goes in search of him; he brings his friend on and introduces him to Lady Clara. The scene may be done first in pantomime and then repeated with improvised words. Either with or without words the candidate will make an amusing grotesque of it on the first attempt, but after two or three attempts he will begin to reveal some social poise if he has any. When, after several rehearsals, he swaggers on with his hands in his pockets and his chewing-gum still in one cheek, stands almost on Lady Clara's feet, and says, "Hullo, Lady Clarrer, wantcher ter meet m'fren' Jones," he can be set down as unavailable for any part in *The Admirable Crichton*.

For a play like *The Admirable Crichton* the test for satirical feeling is especially important. The candidate should be asked to read or recite a satirical poem or prose sketch, or to act out a satirical passage from another play, and should be judged for his ability to convey the double meaning or the tongue-in-the-cheek attitude concealed behind the lines. Almost anybody can convey sharp, bitter irony, but with Barrie the problem is to keep the whimsical light-comedy effect and the gentle good humor, and yet deliver the wallop. One candidate will fail utterly to detect any satirical meaning and will see only naïve romance; another will detect the satirical intent but exaggerate it and make it bitter; another will keep the comedy, but translate the satire into burlesque. The history of American literature is proof that Americans generally are not quite as keenly alive to high-comedy satire as the English, and it is not easy to find young American actors who can act Barrie with just the right flavor. But a candidate who can read Sir Peter Teazle's famous monologue, or Dickens' description of Mr. Turveydrop, or Goldsmith's *Elegy on the Death of a Mad Dog*, or Gilbert's *Rhyme of the Nancy Belle*, or Kipling's *Pink Dominoes*, and do it in

such a way as to bring out the humor and satire, is at least a possibility.

The purpose of the general acting test is clear enough. As already suggested, it should consist of an opportunity to act a complete scene thoroughly prepared in advance. Several candidates may be tried together, in a scene from *Dear Brutus*, or *Quality Street*, or perhaps a scene from some other author of high comedy, like A. A. Milne or Frederick Lonsdale. Costumes and scenery are not essential, but if time permits there should be several repetitions so that the individual may do himself justice after the first self-consciousness has passed. Inexperienced directors do not always make sufficient allowance for the unusual strain attached to tryouts, a strain that is far greater and more artificial when individuals are competing against each other than when they are working as a group to perform the finished play.

The last test, that of a personal interview, is in many respects the most valuable of all, and yet one that many directors omit altogether. It will not, of course, serve by itself, for one wants to know how the candidate will look and act on the platform, viewed objectively; but on the other hand it will reveal quickly many things that will not appear at all in the platform tests until after weeks of rehearsal. The director may question the candidate as to his previous experience, his knowledge of technique, his knowledge of the drama in general and the play to be performed in particular, his tastes and preferences, his admirations and ambitions; and in a general way discover his background and attitude. The candidate's preferences in reading will throw a great deal of light on his possible ability to appreciate satire, as well as on his understanding of literary and social values. Quite obviously this test may be combined with the conversational test already discussed, and the candidate's speech habits tested at the same time; but the director must not be too much concerned with externals and fail to note those deeper things that cannot be taught.

All this is but a suggestion of method. The several tests may be combined in any convenient way, or still further subdivided, and not all of them will be needed with every candidate. The director who has confidence in his own snap judgment will regard the whole business as fantastic, of course. If he can get along with something simpler that is his good luck. Personally I want to know as much as I can find out

about every candidate who applies, and I have found each of these tests helpful in one way or another, at one time or another.

#### THE TWO-CAST SYSTEM

Nearly every director of experience has felt the difficulty of having to make his final decisions in casting before the best candidates have had a chance to show their fullest development. One method which offers at least a partial solution is that of choosing two complete casts, and having each of them rehearse thoroughly up to the time of actual performance. There are certain difficulties in this system, not the least of which is the fact that it just about doubles the director's work; but there are certain compensations that occasionally make it worth while. For one thing it solves the understudy problem as well as it can be solved, and protects the production against the sudden illness of a member of the cast. It makes the competition very keen, and enables the director to reserve his final judgment until the last possible moment. If the players are inclined to be halfhearted it is not likely that they will relish the prospect of working hard up to the final rehearsal and then being obliged to retire in favor of somebody else, although an earnest group with a good director may be willing to take the chance for the sake of the experience and instruction; but this difficulty can be overcome in the case of a production that is to run for a week or more if each cast is promised a chance to perform. If the casts develop with about equal merit the performances may be divided equally between them. If one turns out to be better than the other it may be allowed more performances, or assigned to the preferred evenings. If the two casts have been rehearsed interchangeably it is possible to establish similar preferences with respect to individual players, and if it happens that one particular player appears at the end to be hopelessly inferior to his rival he usually volunteers to withdraw rather than risk the unfavorable comparison.

When the two-cast system can be managed at all it is highly instructive to the players. Just as long as they do not feel that they are working for nothing they are likely to pay keen attention to the play, and to watch each other in rehearsal and performance in a constant effort to learn from and improve upon each other. There is no better way to stimulate their talents. But it is not a plan to be undertaken lightly.



## THE CASTING LIST

In a well-organized theatre group, all casting experience centers, of course, in a casting list, or catalogue of available talent. This should be carefully studied and kept up to date. The results of all tryouts should be reflected in filed entries, both for candidates who have been awarded parts, and for those who have been rejected as unsuitable for certain parts but who might be very useful in parts of a different kind. In addition, periodic or seasonal auditions may be held, without reference to any particular play, but solely for the purpose of building up the talent pool.

A good casting list is extremely helpful when plays are being considered for production, and often the principal parts of a play under consideration can be tentatively cast from the list without recourse to special tryouts.

Each entry in the list should include the player's sex, height, weight, complexion, date of birth (not the *age*, unless the entry itself is dated), and a dated photograph as recent as possible. The entry should list the parts played, with dates, together with any director's comments on the player's special abilities and limitations, including his mannerisms, peculiarities of voice, movement, and temperament, his possession or lack of a comedy sense, and the like. It might well include also his measurements, hat and wig sizes, and so on. Most important of all, it should include his record for attendance at rehearsals, ability to take direction, quickness and accuracy in learning lines, and general reliability. Naturally, the list should be kept under lock and key, and made available only to directors and casting committees.



## CHAPTER XI



### *The Director as Teacher*

IN THE study of the play and the planning of the production the director is first of all an artist, and as an artist he must continue to function until the finished performance leaves his hands. But with the assembling of the cast and the start of actual rehearsals he begins to function also as a teacher, and his ability as a teacher is so important an element in the success of the production, and the permanent success of the producing group, that it deserves rather more than the usual amount of emphasis.

#### THE THEATRE AS A SCHOOL

In the European repertory theatre the regisseur is, as a rule, not only the managerial head of an organization but the headmaster of a permanent school as well. He is interested in the artistic presentation of each play, and in the efficient conduct of the business of production; but he is also interested in the development and improvement of the actors, and the building up of a strong ensemble. He does not go out and hire a ready-made cast for each new play; he adds new recruits to his company because they show promise, and he helps them, through years of training and experience, to develop that promise into achievement. The result is an *esprit de corps*, a group solidarity, and an artistic unity almost unknown today in the American professional theatre.

Now and then, of course, an American producer does succeed in establishing a somewhat analogous relationship. Augustin Daly and A. M. Palmer did so in the eighties; David Belasco did so a generation later, and there have been approximations of it at times in the repertory companies of Sothorn and Marlowe, Walter Hampden, Eva Le Gallienne, and others. But for the most part the strictly commercial theatre in this country is on an entirely different basis. A producer accepts a play, engages a director, and hires a cast. He does not hire learners if he can

help it; he hires people who are already identified with the types of parts they are to play. The director starts with the assumption that his actors are finished artists who know their business thoroughly, and the actors generally start with the same assumption. The director tells them where to go and what to do rather than *how* to do it, or *why*. If the actors are good-humored and the director tactful he may give them some hints on acting, or suggestions as to interpretation, but he cannot feel any deep obligation to teach them anything beyond the needs of the particular play. If they are not good-humored, they are likely to resent any instructions beyond the needs of the play. If they are underlings they do as they are told; if they are stars they do as they please. The combination of trade-unionism, type casting, and temporary organization has made almost impossible the teaching relationship so necessary to a permanently fine theatre.

It is in the amateur or semi-professional theatre, the school or community theatre, that the teaching relationship can best exist. The director of amateurs, especially when he is himself a professional,<sup>1</sup> has an obvious responsibility for the training of his actors that the hired director in the commercial theatre is under no obligation to feel; and if the actors happen to be earnest and eager to learn, the theatre soon begins to function as a school and the director as a teacher. It is, I believe, the existence of this relationship in our little theatres that has enabled so many of them to compete in popularity with the commercial theatres, and that has caused some of them, on their own merits, to turn into professional theatres of the repertory type. It has also caused a number of them to establish schools of their own, so called, as in the Pasadena Playhouse, or in the numerous "summer stock" theatres; or to arrange cooperative educational programs with the colleges or universities, as in the Cleveland Playhouse and Western Reserve University.

What the American theatre—amateur and professional—most needs is the constant encouragement of its function as a school. Not, of course, as a school for the audience, and not as a school in the uplift or missionary sense; but as a school for its own development, a school of its own art. For the development of such a function the director—or directors if there

<sup>1</sup> I should like, here, to define a professional as one who is making the theatre his vocation and not necessarily as one who has been on the commercial stage.

are several—must establish in relation to the actors a true teaching attitude.<sup>2</sup>

### THE TEACHING ATTITUDE

A true teaching attitude does not mean a didactic or dictatorial attitude, an assumption of omniscience or of superiority on the part of the teacher. Nobody is more painfully aware of how little he knows than the earnest teacher, for the very effort to teach somebody else reveals to him the gaps in his own knowledge. An effective teaching attitude is not, of course, inconsistent with dignity and self-respect, but it is characterized by modesty, sympathy, and tolerance. A good teacher aims to teach rather than to command. He does not pretend to know everything or to be right in all his opinions, and he expects to learn as much from his students as they learn from him. His function is to guide and assist them in their efforts to learn, and to serve as a sort of clearing house through which the experiences of others may be passed on to them.

Perhaps the most essential element of a good teaching attitude on the part of the stage director is a willingness to explain his directions; to give reasons; to teach the *why* as well as the *what*. Tell an actor what to do and it may serve for the needs of the play; tell him why, and you have taught him a principle which he may be able to apply for himself on another occasion. Too often the director begrudges the time or effort involved in giving reasons; or he assumes that the actor is too stupid to understand them, or too indifferent to care; or—breathe it softly—he has no reasons to give. Sometimes he has a conscious conviction that the actors ought not to know why they do things, that they ought to be clay in the director's hands, mere brainless "übermarionettes," expressing the director's art in their own.

It may be said in objection to the teaching of reasons that there is not sufficient time for the director to explain every direction he gives, or to teach elementary principles of acting; and this unfortunately is true. But no one contends that the director should turn his rehearsals into kindergarten classes and permit the work to be constantly interrupted by foolish or needless questions; and no one contends that he should put himself on

<sup>2</sup> For an interesting discussion of the theatre as school, see Granville-Barker, *The Exemplary Theatre*.

the defensive and feel compelled to explain himself every time he makes a decision. What he should do is to meet half way the actor who is seeking to improve himself, who is interested in the play as well as in the part, and who is willing and eager to give serious study to the whole problem of production. Sometimes it is necessary to require that questions and discussions be postponed until after rehearsals—but this is a matter of expediency and not of attitude. The important point is that the director shall take it for granted that the actor wants to learn, and shall help him as much as possible.

#### WHAT TO TEACH

Given a teaching attitude on the part of the director, the question arises: What shall he teach?

Clearly he must teach the meaning, lines, and business of the play in hand. Also, if he is to have any permanent success, he must teach the actors an attitude—a learning attitude to correspond with his teaching attitude. But possibly the most obvious need, if we consider the little theatres of the country, is that he shall teach acting,<sup>3</sup> for it is in the acting that our non-professional theatres are most conspicuously inferior. In this connection I cannot refrain from quoting some significant words of Mr. Walter Prichard Eaton. Writing in the *Little Theatre Review* of October 21, 1920, and speaking of the little theatre, he says:

. . . In the matter of plays, it is easy enough for the ambitious amateurs to excel, because they have only to produce what the professional theatre, as at present organized, will not risk. In the matter of scenery and stage adornment, both their inferior income and their generally superior taste and imagination over the average professional manager, help the amateurs to suggestiveness and simplicity. The weak point, and the dangerous point, is the acting.

I have great sympathy with the ideals of the "new stagecraft," with all attempts to catch the peculiar rhythm and style of a play and reflect it in every detail of a harmonious production. Nevertheless, I fear the stubborn fact will not down that "the peculiar pleasure of the theatre" still resides, as it always has resided, more largely in the presence of living actors than in any other element, and nothing can compensate for poor acting, unskillful acting, acting without illusion. . . .

<sup>3</sup> Mr. Granville-Barker (in *The Exemplary Theatre*, page 101) takes the position that acting should not be taught. What he appears to mean is that nothing should be done to encourage young people in the too common notion of acting as a mere surface accomplishment of mimicry or impersonation. In this we must all concur. Young people must not be taught the practice, the trickery, of acting while yet too shallow or immature to appreciate the underlying principles and substance. But if we are to have better acting we must teach it; the thing is to teach the substance and the principles and not the mere technique.

That the acting in our college and community theatres has improved since 1920 no one will dispute; nevertheless it still is, and in the nature of things will always be, the point of greatest difficulty.

Mr. Eaton offers no analysis of the bad acting he complains of, but my own observation indicates a greater lack of teamwork than of individual talent. Amateur actors often show flashes of brilliance or power, and a freshness, a spontaneity, that in itself is good; but they lack technical smoothness, poise, and group coordination.

The director should teach his actors to think in terms of plays, not parts; of scenes, not lines; of stage pictures and stage actions as seen by the audience, not individual movements and business. Such teaching will not confuse the actor, nor will it tempt him to neglect the movements and business prescribed. The better he understands the purpose of what he does and the more clearly he sees his own actions as a part of the general scheme, the easier it will be for him to accept the directions given and perform them with precision, and the greater will be his individual creative freedom within the natural limitations of the play. There is nothing so conducive to real artistic freedom as knowing just how far you can go.

The director should teach his actors how to analyze a play, to find the author's meaning, to catch the mood and rhythm of each act and scene, to visualize the background or period, and to discover the relation of each character to the play as a whole. He should explain the essentials of plot construction, the distinction between comedy and tragedy, and the characteristics of the principal styles and types of plays. He should stress particularly the importance of *theme* and the advisability of toning the acting according to the theme rather than the plot.

The director should teach his actors the essential principles of stage movement and business. He should encourage intelligent discussion and intelligent experiment. He should emphasize especially the element of compensation that so often appears—the necessity for one character to balance another, to give way for another's movement or fill in after it. He should teach them to feel the balance of the stage picture in their own bodies, to correct it, when imperfect, as unobtrusively as possible by slight changes of position; but he should distinguish between an accidentally unbalanced picture and one purposely unbalanced to create suspense or anticipation. He should teach them to take and hold the attention at certain points and to yield it at others, according to the needs of the play.

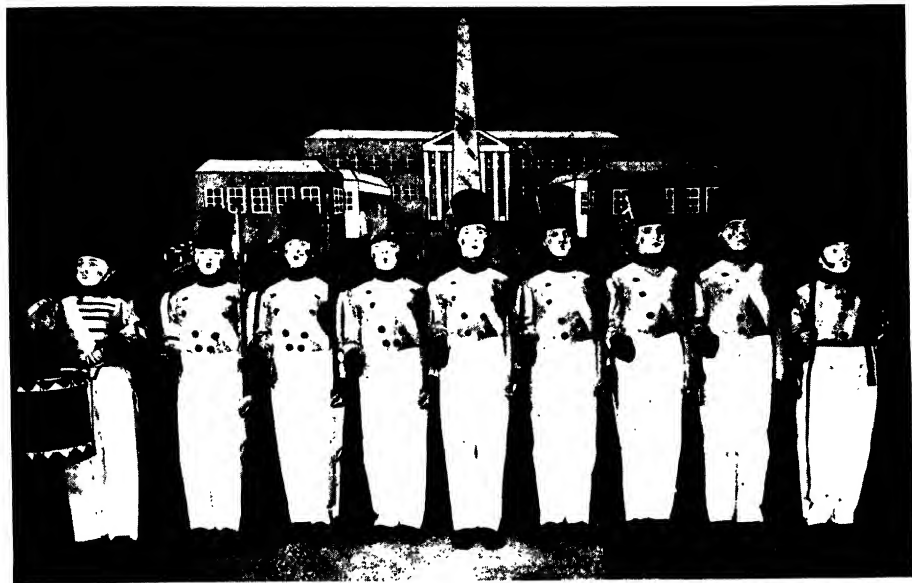
He should teach them how to remain in character and to act when not speaking, yet without distracting attention from the other characters; how to listen effectively to other characters; how to remain in repose when on the stage but out of the action.

He should teach them to maintain what William Gillette calls the "illusion of the first time"—the illusion that the character is uttering his words for the first time and not merely repeating memorized lines.

He should teach them the most important conventions and devices of acting, emphasizing always the principles and purposes rather than the mechanism, but bearing in mind that the stage is not real life and that acting is not just "being natural." He should teach them to play toward, but not to, the audience; to convey meaning without direct communication; to suppress meaningless movement; to cultivate repose; to keep out of emphasis when not emphasized by the dramatist; to heighten effects a little beyond nature; and above all, to simplify—to select essentials and reject useless detail as every artist does.

The director should encourage his actors to train their bodies, to cultivate grace and poise and expressiveness. If they need more instruction than he can give them, he should try to have them get it elsewhere. Some will need courses in dancing, or fencing, or eurhythmics, or plain gymnastics. Others will need drill in gesture and in traditional stage movements, foot positions, turns, and the like—although stage drill is capable of abuse and should not be carried to excess. Others will need instruction in etiquette, poise, and carriage; for almost no young man today can carry himself with the dignity of an earlier generation, and almost no young woman can walk across the stage gracefully. The actor can never tell when he may be called upon to play a drawing-room part or to dance, fence, box, or play the piano; the greater the number of such accomplishments he has at hand, and the greater his flexibility and adaptability, the better his chance of success.

The director should encourage his actors to practice pure pantomime. It may even be worth while for him to conduct such exercises himself. Numerous articles on pantomime may be found, most of them suggesting lists of subjects; or the director may draw his subjects from bits of pantomimic action in plays with which he is familiar—the checker game in *What Every Woman Knows*, for instance, or the dart-throwing scene in *You Can't Take It With You*, or the scene in which the principal char-



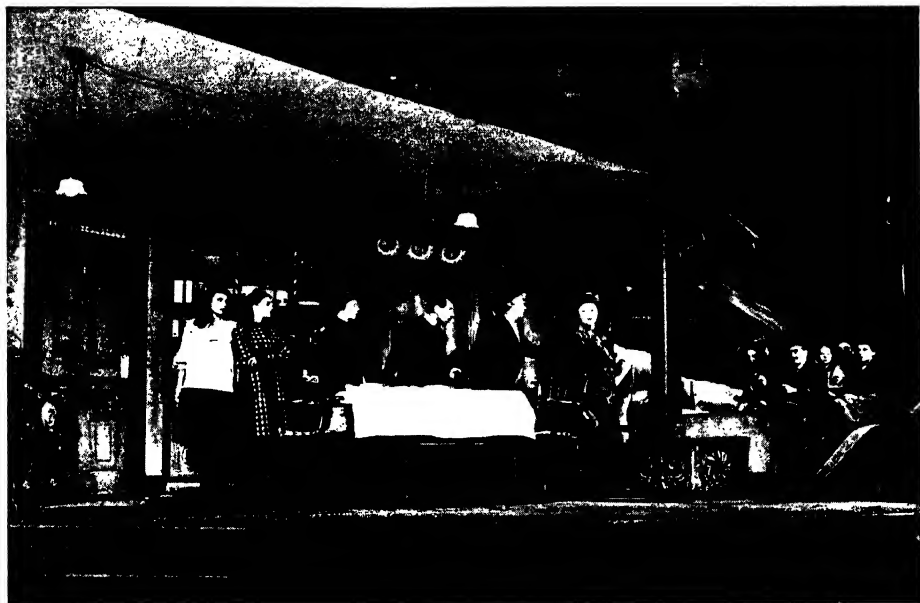
*Plate 9. Toy-Like Stylization. The famous Chauve Souris, or "Bat Theatre" of Moscow. Highly colored designs by Remisoff and Soudeikine in the manner of Russian toys. ABOVE: Parade of the Wooden Soldiers. BELOW: Romance of Katinka and the Soldier. INSERT: The original Katinka, before the romance.*



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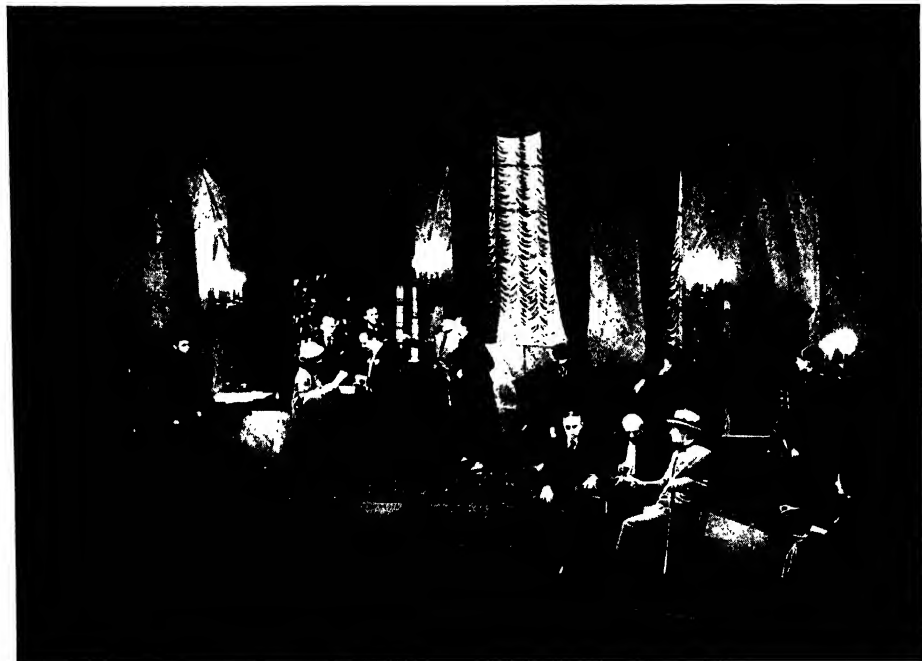




Vandamm

*Plate 10. Elaboration with Quick Change.* ABOVE: Part of the turntable-and-wagon setting by George Jenkins for *I Remember Mama*. The back drop was visible on both sides of the cut-out house, and soared far above it. BELOW: The lobby scene from *Grand Hotel*, set on a jack-knife stage; designer, Aline Bernstein.

Vandamm

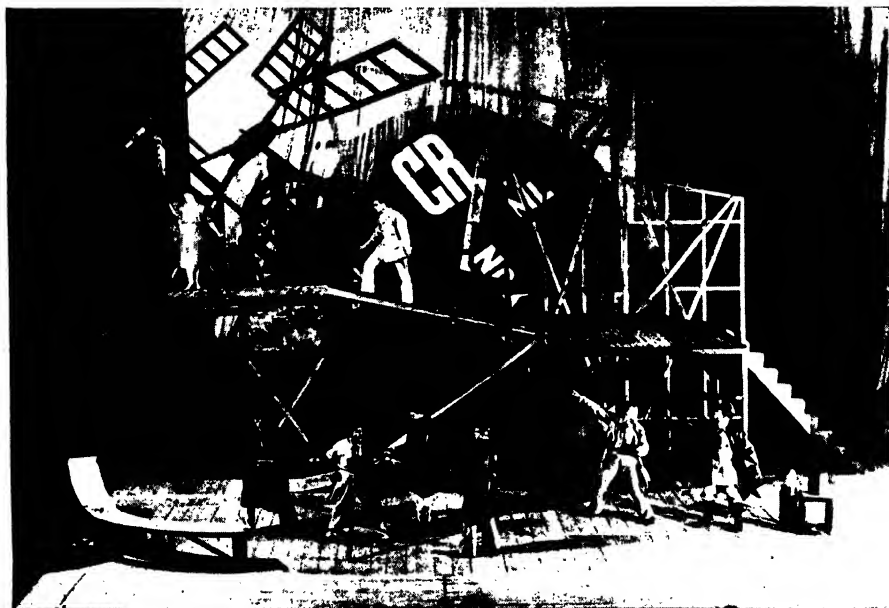


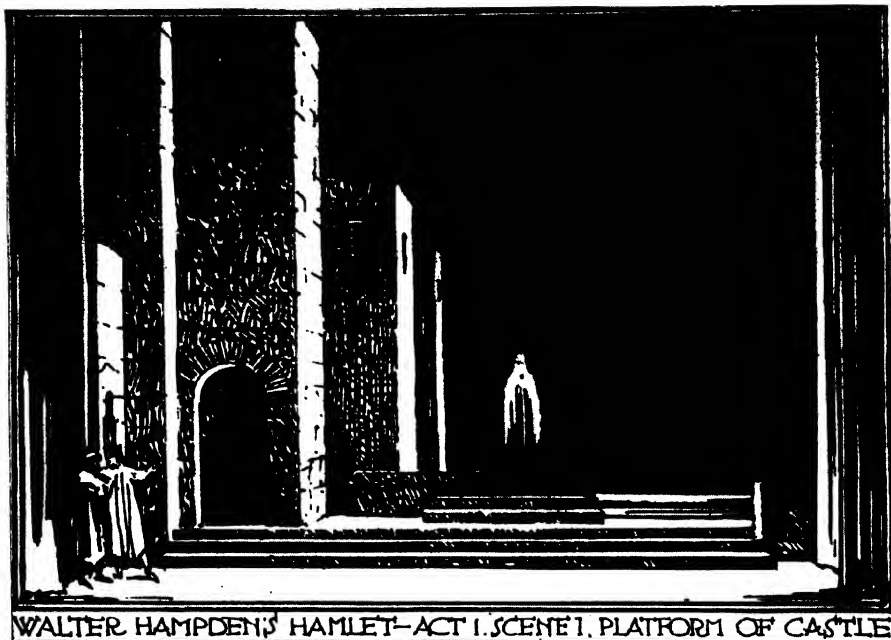


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*Plate 11. Elaboration in Russia.* ABOVE: A stylized setting for *The Pickwick Club* at the First Moscow Art Theatre. Note the elaborate back drop (including a painted figure), and compare it with that of *I Remember Mama*. BELOW: A constructivist setting by L. Popova for *The Magnificent Cuckold*, at the Meyerhold Theatre, Moscow. Though intended to be anti-decorative, it achieves better composition than most constructivist settings.

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WALTER HAMPDEN'S HAMLET—ACT I, SCENE 1, PLATFORM OF CASTLE

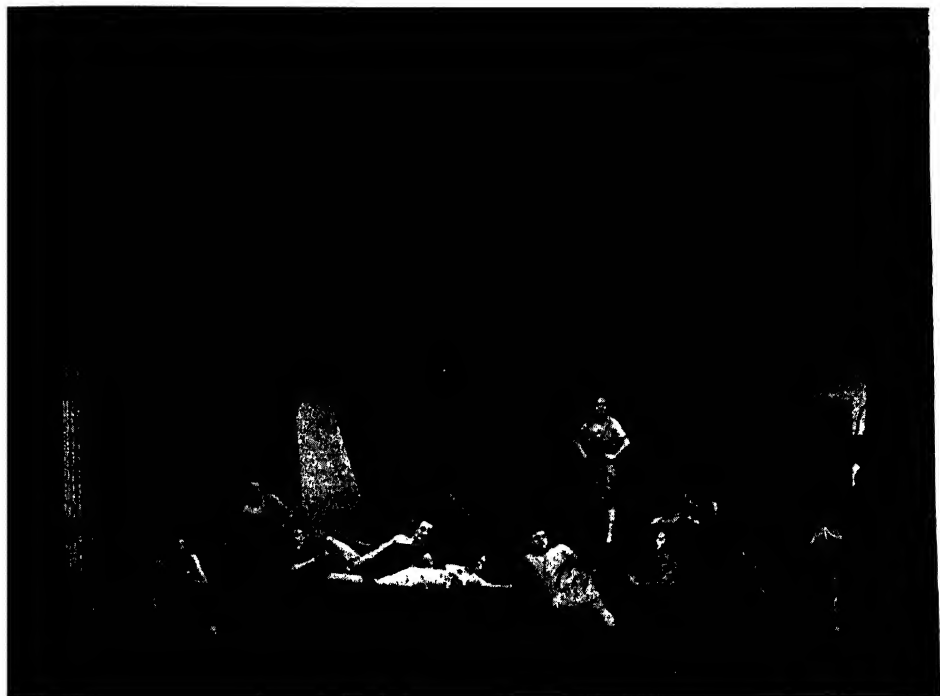
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*Plate 12. An Adaptable Setting for Shakespeare.* One of the earliest and best of modern unit settings. Two of the famous designs by Claude Bragdon for Walter Hampden's Shakespearean Repertory. Platforms, screens, arches, and draperies, permitting many rearrangements with quick changes.

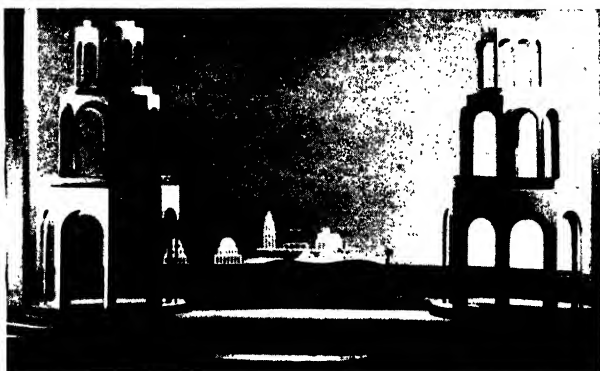
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WALTER HAMPDEN'S HAMLET—ACT I, SCENE 2, A HALL IN THE CASTLE



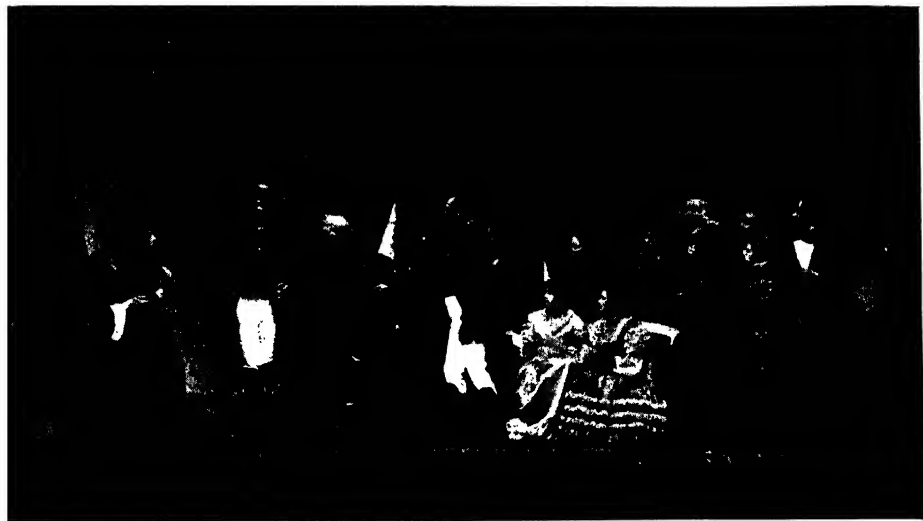
late 13. Stylization, West and East. ABOVE: An amusing set for the world premiere of *The Return of Ulysses*, by Emil Ludwig, at the Pasadena Playhouse. Director, Winslow Stevens; designer, Anita Glover. RIGHT: A Soviet version of Shakespeare; two scenes from a skeleton setting of *Much Ado About Nothing* at the Vakhtangov Theatre, Moscow. Note the impression of distance achieved by low ground-rows against a sky cyclorama.





*Plate 14. Simplified Realism Plus Expressionism.* An interesting combination of space-stage economy in a realistic foreground with an expressionistic symbol developed in the background. First and last scenes of *East Lynne*, as designed and produced by Wesley Wiksell at Stephens College.





*Plate 15. Realism with Comic Exaggeration. Two scenes from Gogol's *The Inspector-General*, illustrating control of attention through the grouping of characters. ABOVE: The quick shift of attention from the postmaster to the gendarme as the latter enters with the summons. BELOW: The sudden tableau on which the curtain descends, INSERT: The Town Governor explains apologetically to Khlestakov.*



**Plate 16. *Star System Democracy.*** ABOVE: An amusing example of the contrast in type accorded an actor on his benefit night and when supporting a visiting star. Note that Mrs. John Drew, William Wheatley, and John Sleeper Clarke got small type also, though the theatre had been Wheatley and Drew's the year before, was Wheatley and Clarke's in 1860, and became Mrs. John Drew's in 1861. LEFT: An old engraving of Charlotte Cushman as Romeo, with her sister Susan as Juliet.

acter in *Old English* drinks himself to death.

The director should impress upon his actors the importance of voice and should give them every possible help in voice training. Most young actors fail to realize the need of such training and can only be driven to it by constant urging.

He should teach his actors to observe the life that is about them, to be interested in the speech and the actions of all sorts of people. He should suggest that they carry notebooks in which to jot down interesting bits of action, traits of character, mannerisms, tricks or peculiarities of speech, or what not, as observed on trains or trolley cars, in the shops or on the streets. He should, however, caution them against too literal a copy of life with consequent loss of æsthetic distance, and against the danger of dragging in good business for its own sake without regard to relevancy. He should encourage the study of human motives and the cultivation of sympathy and understanding. He should warn his actors against interpreting all human life in terms of their own motives, or the motives of their own age, race, nation, or social level, and should impress upon them the advantage of mixing with all classes of society, of knowing all quarters of the city or country, and of understanding the conditions of other countries and other historical periods.

He should urge them to read and study—to know something of history, philosophy, and literature, and perhaps even of science. He should encourage study and appreciation of the other fine arts and should emphasize the similarity of aim and principle in all of them. He should teach the leading theories of æsthetic appeal, especially the principles of empathy and æsthetic distance, and he should make every effort to relate these principles to actual practice. He should strive to make his actors artistically sensitive, that they may learn to avoid false notes in acting to spare themselves pain, as a musician avoids false notes in music.

To teach all of these things is, of course, a superhuman task. There is never any limit to the possibilities; the limits are found only in the equipment, the time available, the capabilities of the actors, and the ability of the director himself.

#### TEACHING METHOD

There are those who believe that a teaching attitude and something to teach make a teacher; there are others who consider the technique of



teaching a science in itself, and an essential element of any educational process. The problem is too extensive to be considered here. There are, however, one or two controversial questions concerning the teaching method of the stage director which have greatly disturbed the teachers of dramatics and even the critics of the professional theatre, and which therefore deserve some comment.

The first of these is the question of democracy versus dictatorship, already discussed in relation to the planning of stage movement and business. As applied to teaching method, the question is this: Should the director adopt a sort of *laissez-faire* policy in teaching, striving to inspire his students to learn for themselves, but leaving them to find the way; or should he assume definite control of their activities, guiding and shaping their studies at every point? Stanislavsky, one of the greatest of teaching directors, suggested that the director should not generate an idea, but should merely preside at its birth. Gordon Craig, on the other hand, would make the actor an "übermarionette," subservient to the director at every point. David Belasco shaped and trained his actors by close personal instruction until they were always recognizable as Belasco products; Arthur Hopkins is said to sit quietly at rehearsals, giving no sign until something goes wrong, and then merely indicating that something is wrong and leaving it to the actors to find out what, and to correct it.

Clearly the question of which is the better teaching method depends somewhat upon the object to be attained. But it depends also upon the director's own ability and upon the age and temperament of the actor who is to be taught. The beginner may require more definite rule-of-thumb teaching than the experienced actor. In so complex a problem generalization is futile; the director should understand and use both methods, according to circumstances.

Another and more important question is whether the director should make use of demonstration in his teaching—whether he should show an actor how to do a thing and permit him to learn it by imitation. On this subject there has been violent disagreement. Some amateur directors and teachers of dramatics are so afraid of imitation that they will not permit the slightest suggestion of it—not even when the actor is totally at a loss what to do and says, "Please show me." They seem to feel that it means the downfall of his creative freedom and the enslavement of his personality, if not the loss of his immortal soul!

With the essence of their contention one must, of course, agree. Nobody except Gordon Craig wants the actor to be a mere puppet in the hands of the director, and nobody at all wants him to be a pale copy or some one else—a mere mechanical imitator of things he does not understand. But when the extremists insist that imitation is necessarily ruinous to the sincerity and individuality of the actor, one wonders whether their theory is consistent with the psychology of the learning process. The psychologists themselves are divided on this point. Some maintain that the impulse to imitate is inherited and plays a large part in the learning process; others insist that the learning process begins with random movements which are gradually “conditioned” by experience, and that imitation is possible only in the case of activities already learned by accident. If the latter are correct, there can be little danger in imitation, since it cannot take place until the thing to be imitated is already learned through experience. If the former are correct, and imitation is an essential part of the learning process, why be afraid to make use of it?

Our education is built up largely, if not wholly, out of our experiences. We do not create our thoughts out of nothing; we build them out of elements drawn from observation. If the necessary elements are lacking, we cannot create; we must first gain more experience, and it is here that demonstration comes in. When the director tells an actor that he ought to get a certain effect and the actor, after several attempts, says: “I can’t do it; I don’t know what you mean; please show me”—he is merely saying that he cannot create because he has not the necessary experience. If at that point the director can show him what to do, or have some one else show him, the whole situation may be cleared up. If, after being shown, the actor still does not understand and falls back on slavish, hollow mimicry, it is a very dull director indeed who fails to detect the fault, and a very foolish one who allows it to go uncorrected. But if the effect of the demonstration is to give the actor just that fresh light which he needs—to make him say, “Oh, now I understand; that is a good idea; I wish I had thought of it myself”—I do not believe that he is likely to be ruined by the slight element of imitation that may creep into his playing.

There is still another question of method in teaching which every director must face, and that is the question of the actor’s emotions and the extent to which the director is to appeal to them, to exercise them, and to teach the actor to depend upon them. But this is so bound up with the

theory of acting, to be discussed in a later chapter, that I shall omit consideration of it at this point.

#### THE TEACHER AS DIRECTOR

The teaching relationship of the director to his actors is seen at its best, perhaps, in the school or college play. The person who is a teacher in the classroom naturally functions as a teacher in directing a production by his own pupils, whether as part of a course or as an extra-curricular activity. To be sure, he does not always preserve the classroom manner—which is a gain rather than a loss—but he assumes as a matter of course the task of training the individuals as well as the group. To this fact may be attributed the surprisingly high quality—all things considered—of the average school play.

I say “all things considered” because I happen to know some of the difficulties of the schoolteacher-director. In the first place there is the inescapable youth and immaturity of the players, even among those of college age. In the second place there is the fact that the boys and girls do not remain long enough under the director’s charge to gain the necessary experience; about the time they begin to develop they take their diplomas and go home. In the third place there is the almost total lack of persons to play old and middle-aged parts. In the fourth place there is frequently the handicap of an unsuitable place to play and the difficulty of finding time for rehearsals. In the fifth place there is the financial problem. And finally there is the fact that in a vast majority of cases the teacher, no matter how good a teacher or how well fitted temperamentally for the work, has had no practical training back stage; has, in many instances, never seen a first-class professional performance or been inside a real theatre. This is especially true today, for the moving pictures have driven the road companies out of the small towns, and first-rate companies visit only a very few of the larger cities. Under the circumstances, it is no wonder that most school performances are crude and unpolished and immature; the amazing thing is that they show as much intelligence and imagination and taste as they do. At least it may be said that, taking the country as a whole, the school play is a good two jumps ahead of the audience.

The teacher as director is, as a rule, more likely to have the right attitude toward his work than most other directors, and, perhaps, more likely

to pursue an effective teaching method. If he makes any mistake in his teaching, it is almost sure to be an overemphasis on the interpretative work of the individual and an underemphasis on the teamwork. Most school plays are poorly organized and loosely directed, though excellently "coached"—if the distinction may be permitted. For that reason the teacher who is called upon to direct plays should lose no opportunity to learn of the technical side of the theatre and no opportunity to cultivate the organizing ability so necessary to the director as executive.

#### EDUCATIONAL DRAMATICS

Of late years a great many schools and colleges have been making dramatics a part of the curriculum rather than an extra-curricular activity. The educational influence of play production in teaching literary and artistic values, appreciation of the drama, sympathetic understanding of character, control of body, speech, and imagination, has very properly earned it a place in the curriculum. But its classroom values have led some teachers to take a somewhat distorted view of the whole purpose of educational dramatics.

According to these teachers, dramatics in an educational institution should exist for educational rather than artistic purposes. To this end, they say, there should be less attention paid to the excellence of the production as a whole than to the educational effect on those taking part; there should be no attempt to choose the cast for the good of the play by selecting actors according to their suitability for the parts; the students should, instead, be deliberately assigned to characters unlike themselves, in order to correct their faults of personality. Thus, a small, effeminate youth should be chosen for a heavy, masculine part, in order to render him less effeminate; an ill-tempered, surly person should be chosen for a courteous, kindly part, in order to improve his disposition. And above all, no attention should be paid to the matter of pleasing the audience, who should be suffered to attend at their own risk.

In this point of view there are really several propositions more or less distinct.

The first is that educational dramatics should exist to educate the person taking part and not to please the audience. At first sight this seems reasonable enough, but the danger lies in the assumption of an irreconcilable alternative. To assume that such methods of production as will please

the audience are probably not the best methods to educate the actor, is to distort the problem. The truth is that the very sort of excellence in production which best pleases audiences is also the best educational influence upon the actor. It is true that pure type casting is bad for the actor—as well as for the production—and if students can be given varied experience without ruining the production, the effect is educational. Even deliberate miscasting may afford good practice to the student if confined to rehearsals without audience, or to classroom exercises. But the purpose of a play is to give æsthetic pleasure to an audience, and any indulgence before an audience in play production which deliberately ignores or sets aside this purpose is intellectually insincere, and therefore vitiating to the educational purpose. Clarity of purpose, sincerity, and coordination of effort are far more important educationally than facility in interpretation, and to sacrifice the greater to the lesser is to falsify the emphasis in education. If the purpose of the fine arts is inconsistent with sound education, the fine arts ought to be bundled right out of our schools. If not, then the purpose should be given the main emphasis, and every effort should be made to accomplish it with the highest possible degree of excellence.

The second proposition is that the student actor should for his own sake be cast for parts unlike himself. But is it a proper function of the educator to mold character in this sense? Is it right to subdue each individual bent or bias by the neutralizing force of an opposite? Or, if only the bad traits are to be subdued, who is to be the judge to decide which traits are bad and what models to follow in the molding process? The proponents of the plan would take a little, effeminate chap and make a man of him by having him play a masculine part. But would they take a husky, boisterous, young athlete and make a mollicoddle out of him by having him play an effeminate part? And if their purpose is to mold character, what parent would want his son to be cast for Macbeth or Shylock or Iago in the school play? Or are the unpleasant parts to be left out, and educational dramatics confined to the representation of saints and heroes?

Of course the whole idea of molding character in this sense is absurd. It is true that the playing of many and varied parts broadens the sympathies of the actor, enriches his imagination, and enables him to understand all human nature a little better; wide reading and constant theatre-going do the same thing, and if acting does it more quickly, it is chiefly because it demands more of the imagination. But to suppose that the

playing of any particular part will mold the actor's character toward an appreciable resemblance to that part is pure nonsense. It is almost a commonplace that the great comedians are serious or even melancholy men; that actresses who depict sweet, innocent young girls are sometimes quite otherwise themselves; that stage villains are often good husbands and fathers at home. It is well known that some of the cleanest and sweetest poets have led dissolute lives; the whole history of art and literature is one long pageant of what Felix E. Schelling calls "projected emotion"—the artistic representation of verities and sincerities quite independent of the artists' own characters, and quite unproductive of any character-molding influence upon them. It all rests on the fact that art is not life, but a more or less idealized imitation of life; and you can no more make a student strong by having him—in the artistic sense—imitate a strong man, than you can ruin him by having him imitate a weak one.

The advocates of specialized educational dramatics are primarily interested in the education of the individual as a human being and not in his training as an actor, but in much of what they say and write they imply that it is best also for the actor as an actor to be given parts unlike himself, and to be required to work for individual experience without regard to the play as a whole or the pleasure of the audience.

This proposition has already been touched upon in the chapter on casting. Variety of experience breeds versatility, and versatility is desirable; the actor who can play only one part—that of himself—is almost as much to be pitied as the actor who cannot play one part any better than another.

But dramatists do not (or should not) write parts, they write plays; and audiences come to see plays. Good acting does not consist in playing parts; it consists in playing plays. It is not individual work, but group work. The individual part is the elementary part of acting, and within the limits of talent it is the easy part. It is the teamwork that is hard, and rare, and that must be learned even by those who have the talent. Above all it is the teamwork that counts most in accomplishing the purpose of the play. To miscast the parts and to ignore the pleasure of the audience is to put a discount on teamwork right from the start, and it is therefore the worst possible way of training actors.



## *Rehearsal: Blocking Out*

WE COME now to the director's most active personal responsibility: the conduct of rehearsals.

Rehearsals have at least three different purposes, and it is well to distinguish them at the start. The first is to give opportunity for experiment; the second is to teach the text and meaning of the play to the cast, and the third is to perfect and polish the performance. The division is arbitrary, but useful.

Most amateurs are too busy with other interests, too pressed for time, and too restless, for very much indulgence in experimental rehearsal. The director working with such people must do most of his experimenting in advance or between rehearsals, and devote the rehearsals themselves to learning and to polishing. A certain amount of experiment is, to be sure, inevitable in the early rehearsals, for no matter how well a production has been planned unexpected problems will arise during the blocking-out period, and changes will have to be made. But it is a common mistake with amateur directors to use so much time in the feeble, head-scratching kind of experiment that when the date for the performance begins to draw near it becomes necessary to concentrate on the learning process, and the polishing gets crowded out altogether. The director should realize that a production which is not learned in time to allow for thorough polishing cannot be otherwise than crude in performance, no matter how well worked out in the experimental stage; and if he values his reputation he will sacrifice other things, including his own time, to provide for adequate polishing.

### THE SCHEDULE OF REHEARSALS

To avoid the danger of neglecting some phase of production, it is a good plan to work out in advance a definite schedule of rehearsals. The shorter the time, the more important this becomes. If a complete schedule

cannot be arranged before the first rehearsal, a tentative schedule may be posted, to be replaced after the play has been blocked out by a corrected schedule showing the exact number of remaining rehearsals and the exact ground to be covered in each.

Different types of plays call, of course, for differently planned schedules. Some plays are so constructed that they must be rehearsed chiefly for continuity and ensemble; others can be rehearsed by acts; others, by separate scenes. *The Yellow Jacket*, for example, is a series of brief episodes involving a few characters each; these episodes can be rehearsed separately, and the whole play need not be put together until the last few rehearsals. *The Inspector-General*, on the other hand, is built around ensemble scenes, and most of the rehearsals must be general ones with the whole cast present. Some plays are so dependent for their effects upon costume that they require a number of dress rehearsals; others depend upon lighting effects which must be carefully rehearsed, and others depend so completely upon the recital of the lines that much of the work may be in the nature of individual coaching.

In general, it is a good plan to break up the play into small scenes, and to rehearse these separately in the early stages—partly to permit of more intensive study and partly to save the actors who appear in only a few scenes from sitting about all evening doing nothing. Difficult scenes involving only one, two, or three characters—soliloquies, love scenes, duels, fist fights, quarrels, dances, conspiracies—should be worked out in special rehearsals, with as much individual instruction as possible. Most amateur directors other than teachers fail to realize the importance of individual consultation; they follow the professional method of issuing directions at rehearsals and expecting the actor to perfect himself at home, which is just what the inexperienced actor cannot do. A great deal of time is wasted by amateurs in poorly planned and ineffective general rehearsals.

It is well, also, to vary the emphasis of the general rehearsals, announcing one for detail, another for continuity, another for cues, another for tempo, and so on. This helps to insure that each important phase of preparation will be attended to; at the same time it gives the actors a clearer idea of what to work for, and promotes teamwork. During the last week or so it is especially desirable to alternate rehearsals for detail and for continuity; if you pull the play apart one night, put it together again the next.



It is not possible to lay out an ideal schedule of rehearsals that will do for every play, but a sample schedule may be helpful to the inexperienced director as indicating what he may do with the time available. Suppose, for instance, that he has eight weeks in which to rehearse a modern three-act comedy, and that most of the cast except the principals can spare only two full evenings a week, with perhaps a little more time during the last two or three weeks. Suppose that only four of the principals are in all three acts, and that Act Two uses a different setting and a different group of supporting characters from Acts One and Three. Suppose, also, that only the last week of rehearsals can be held on the stage, and that the others must be held in private houses or borrowed rehearsal rooms. A tentative schedule might read somewhat as follows:

*First Week*

TUESDAY, 8 p.m.—Reading of play. Discussion.

THURSDAY, 8 p.m.—Blocking out of Act I.

*Second Week*

TUESDAY, 8 p.m.—Blocking out of Act II.

THURSDAY, 7 p.m.—Review of Act I. 8:30 p.m.—Blocking out of Act III.

SUNDAY, 3 p.m.—Round-table conference; discussions of meanings and interpretations.

*Third Week*

TUESDAY, 7 p.m.—Review Acts I and III, for detail.

THURSDAY, 7 p.m.—Review Act II, for detail.

SUNDAY, 3 p.m.—Key scenes, principals only.

*Fourth Week*

TUESDAY, 7 p.m.—Act I, without books (or sides).

THURSDAY, 7 p.m.—Act II, without books (or sides).

SUNDAY, 3 p.m.—Act III, without books (or sides).

*Fifth Week*

TUESDAY, 7 p.m.—Run-through, whole play, for lines.

THURSDAY, 7 p.m.—Key scenes, for detail.

SUNDAY, 3 p.m.—Whole play, for detail.

*Sixth Week*

TUESDAY, 8 p.m.—Whole play at fast tempo, for continuity.

THURSDAY, 7 p.m.—Act II, for detail.

SUNDAY, 3 p.m.—Acts I and III, for detail.

*Seventh Week*

MONDAY, 8 p.m.—Special rehearsals or consultations as needed.  
TUESDAY, 7 p.m.—Rehearsal for mood and emphasis. Whole play.  
THURSDAY, 7 p.m.—Rehearsal for speed and polish. Whole play.  
FRIDAY, 8 p.m.—Special rehearsals or individual coaching as needed.  
SUNDAY, 3 p.m.—Line rehearsal, while crew sets up stage.

*Eighth Week*

MONDAY, 7 p.m.—Stage rehearsal with furniture and props; whole play.  
TUESDAY, 8 p.m.—Special rehearsals, individuals or key scenes.  
WEDNESDAY, 8 p.m.—Rehearsal for speed and polish.  
THURSDAY, 8 p.m.—Special rehearsals, if needed. Crew rehearsal.  
FRIDAY, 7 p.m.—Costume rehearsal, for detail. Interruptions, repeats, photographs, etc. All night, if necessary.  
SUNDAY, 3 p.m.—Full dress rehearsal run as a performance, with invited audience and no interruptions.

*Ninth Week*

MONDAY, 8:30 p.m. sharp—Performance (cast report at 7 p.m.).

Obviously, all this is subject to great variation. There may be objection to Sunday rehearsals; Monday, Wednesday, and Friday nights may turn out to be more suitable. Important players may have fixed engagements that interfere with certain dates. A different type of play may call for an entirely different distribution of emphasis. If all rehearsals can be held on the stage the schedule may be simpler and perhaps shorter; if the set and props are available earlier a more polished result can be expected.

If only six weeks are available, the proper procedure is not to omit the work of the seventh and eighth weeks, but to condense as far as possible the work of the first two weeks, and of the fourth, fifth, and sixth, as here given.

It will be seen that this schedule requires very few of the actors to attend more than two full evenings a week until the last week, but still gives them opportunity to come out for short additional periods now and then to rehearse special scenes or to join in consultations. The director, of course, must work almost every evening unless he can train a competent assistant to carry part of the burden.

Some groups of experienced amateurs or semi-professionals would, of course, regard an eight-week schedule as absurdly long and exacting. Suf-

ficient, they think, to have genius, experience, ability to commit lines—and four or five rehearsals. The players of the Moscow Art Theatre, on the other hand, would regard it as inadequate, and would prefer to labor over the play for additional weeks or months. Doubtless there will always be these two extremes of opinion, with corresponding results.

### THE FIRST READING

Many directors like to begin rehearsals with a reading of the play. Whether this is necessary or not depends upon circumstances.

If books are not available and the actors must learn their parts from "sides" a reading is almost essential as a means of telling them what the play is about. It should not be conducted as a rehearsal; there should be no blocking out of the stage positions and no reading of parts by the actors. Instead the reading should be done by some person who can read well and who is already familiar with the play—the author himself, if possible. Interruptions should be permitted only for necessary questions on the meaning, but at the end of the reading there should be a little time for informal discussion.

When printed books are available they should be distributed several days before the first meeting of the cast, and each player should be instructed to read and analyze the play for himself, and to make note of any points he may care to have discussed. Some actors—even experienced professionals—have to be driven to do this, and some cannot be driven. There are actors who prefer not to know what the play is about, being interested only in their own parts. They are nuisances. The only really satisfactory actor is the one who wants to understand the play thoroughly in order that he may become a part of the whole rather than an exploiter of his own powers. The strongest argument for the use of printed books is that they emphasize the play rather than the parts, and so encourage the group attitude.

Whether a formal reading is necessary when the actors are supplied with books depends largely upon the nature of the play itself. If it is subtle or obscure in meaning a reading may be advisable, particularly if the author can be present and can do the reading; the actors are bound to learn from him a little more about his meaning and intention than appears in the text. But if time is very short and the author not available it is seldom wise to use up a whole evening in mere reading.

## THE FIRST REHEARSAL

After the actors have read the play or had it read to them the next step is the "blocking-out" process. If the director has done most of his planning in advance, this process will be greatly simplified. If not, it will consist largely of a trial and error method of working out positions, movement, and business, with many halts for head scratching, many false starts, and many corrections, and with everybody more or less at sea.

If the action has been carefully planned, the director will open the first rehearsal by explaining the arrangement of exits and entrances in the first scene, the positions of the furniture, and the terminology to be used in giving directions. Some directors like the actors to "walk through" their parts on the first rehearsal to fix the locations on their minds; others prefer to have them remain seated and take careful notes. Some like to show a chart of the stage and indicate the positions of the characters at each point in the text with movable push pins. If there is plenty of time and the actors are earnest this plan is helpful; otherwise it does not work. In most cases, perhaps, the walking method is the best. But whether the actors walk through or remain seated they should be instructed to take notes freely, and especially to mark on their parts every position, movement, and action. It is surprising how many actors will not think of taking notes unless told to do so. The director should insist upon the importance of getting everything right in the first few rehearsals, and of learning the positions and actions with the lines.

If the actors are to walk through their parts the furniture should be placed as accurately as possible, and the entrances indicated by extra chairs or by chalk lines on the floor. Hand properties are not needed at this stage, and would seriously interfere with the note taking; but anything that may help to establish spaces and distances should be included. The actors should read their own parts, moving to position as directed, and the director should interrupt freely to give instructions, and should allow time for the actors to enter them in their notes. Continuity is no object at this stage; care and thoroughness in the preliminaries take time, but they mean smoother and better work later on. When the first rehearsal is held in the evening and the actors have been otherwise employed all day it is best to block out only one act; some directors do this anyway, going over the act two or three times to make sure that the directions are properly under-

stood. When the interval before the second rehearsal is to be long this is undoubtedly the best plan.

The director should permit free discussion at the first rehearsal, and should welcome criticisms or suggestions from the actors if given in good faith and good humor. He should try especially to discover whether any of his directions conflict with the actors' understanding of their parts, and to thrash out all such difficulties at the very start. However, when a knotty point arises involving only one or two actors it is usually best not to delay the rehearsal too long, but to pass over the point, make a note of it, and call a special consultation of the persons concerned, to meet if possible before the next regular rehearsal.

It should be understood that the chief purpose of the blocking-out rehearsals is to give the actors something clear and correct to study; whatever is not ready for study should be postponed until it can be made ready.

#### REHEARSING THE LOVE SCENES

The love scenes—and any other especially difficult or embarrassing scenes—are best worked out separately before being rehearsed in the presence of the whole cast. Inexperienced players are naturally self-conscious in the love scenes and afraid of being laughed at. They should be cautioned from the first that the surest way to get themselves laughed at is to look as if they expected it, and that the best way to avoid it is to act their parts boldly, sincerely, and convincingly. But they cannot be expected to do the latter before an audience until they know their parts well and are sure of every posture and movement; hence the need for the separate rehearsal.

The tendency of amateur actors in a love scene is to keep too far apart, and to be too stiff or rigid in posture; to be physically tense rather than imaginatively *intense*. Often they will attempt to embrace with their arms and shoulders while their feet are separated by a good eighteen inches; and instead of gazing fondly into each other's eyes—as it is said real lovers do—they stare vaguely at each other's hands, or coat collars, or at the walls or ceiling. The effect, of course, is ludicrous. The director must attack these and similar faults at the first rehearsal, and if necessary prescribe the exact posture for every minute of the scene. If the actors have had some experience and are known to be reliable he may insist upon their looking into each other's eyes for a part of the time. This is a bit

embarrassing, and can be done effectively only if well rehearsed, but properly done it often marks the difference between a painfully amateurish love scene and one having professional finish. If the actors are too inexperienced or self-conscious to succeed with it, the attempt should be abandoned early and a more conventional plan substituted. The girl may rest her forehead against the man's breast, for example, while he looks down at her hair or off into the distant future. Such a device is less effective empathically than the direct gaze, but is reasonably convincing and much more certain. A conventional posture of this sort should not be held too long.

Audiences seem especially sensitive to the element of beauty in a love scene, and it becomes necessary, therefore, for the director to give particular attention to the pictorial effect. The postures should be chosen not only for appropriateness and convincingness, but also for line, mass, and color. An awkward or ungainly posture or a clashing color scheme will just about ruin an otherwise beautiful love scene.

For the very reason that the love scene is usually the weak point of an amateur production, a well-played love scene will do much to make the whole production less amateurish. It will pay, therefore, to take pains with such scenes in the early rehearsals.

#### THE FIRST REVIEW

Ordinarily the first rough blocking out will extend to the second and third rehearsals, but a portion of the time at each rehearsal after the first week should be devoted to following up or reviewing what has already been blocked out. Otherwise it will grow cold. The director should be cautioned, however, against giving so much time to the first act in review that the other acts never get proper attention. This is one of the commonest faults in amateur production.

The chief purpose of the first review is to afford a check on the actors after they have had a chance to do a little studying. Ordinarily they should not be required to be letter perfect at this stage; they should be studying to understand their parts and especially to fit themselves into the teamwork, and not primarily to commit the lines.

It is in the first review rehearsals that tangles and misunderstandings are to be straightened out, questions answered, suggestions received, and broad problems of interpretation discussed. Details and fine shades of

interpretation should for the most part be postponed until later, but essential questions of meaning should be settled and the major points of emphasis established. At this stage it is particularly important to remember the fundamental principles of good design: fidelity to the main thought and fidelity to the limitations of material. Irrelevancies should be suppressed, and the central idea of the play given the emphasis over subordinate ideas; and the slightest attempt to transcend the limitations of material should be restrained. The limitations in this connection would include those of space, setting, lighting, equipment, and ability; and the director should restrain his own tendency to attempt the impossible, as well as that of the actors. It will develop, perhaps, that some of the actors cannot do certain things assigned to them, and the director may have to modify his plans here and there to keep within their abilities. To know what changes must be made without making unnecessary ones is not so easy.

Useless or meaningless movements should be restrained in the early rehearsals before they get a chance to become habitual, and the actors should be cautioned against fidgeting. They should be instructed to make their movements simple, broad, and decisive so far as these qualities may be consistent with the meaning. When there is much fidgeting the director should try to ascertain the cause. Sometimes he will find that the action he has planned does not articulate effectively with the lines, or does not allow a sufficient outlet for the expressive impulses of the actors. In the latter case as in the case of fidgeting it is futile to attempt repression; the only solution is to devise new and more significant movements or business through which the restless impulses may be discharged. Sometimes the director will find that the movements he has called for do not fit the stage spaces, and that the fidgeting is due to that fact. A very common instance of this occurs when an actor has been told to perform a certain movement on a certain line, and the line proves too long for the movement, so that the actor arrives at his destination too soon, or else slows down the movement until it becomes painfully hesitant and unconvincing. The smaller the stage the greater this difficulty; an actor having to enter on a line finds himself halfway across the stage before the line is finished, stops suddenly, fidgets, and perhaps backs up a little and comes at it again. Another common fault is for those already on the stage to crowd the entrances, so that the newcomer has no chance to come fairly

on. The director should take special pains in his planning and in the early rehearsals to clear the way for each entering character, and to see that the center of action at the moment is far enough away from the entrance to give the actor an adequate excuse for coming well into view. It can hardly be repeated too often that meaningless and irrelevant movements are the bane of amateur theatricals, and that they should be stamped out as far as possible the moment they become evident.

After the first round of review rehearsals, another effort should be made to check all doubtful matters and conclude all necessary experiments. A stage rehearsal at this point, if it can be arranged, is very helpful for trying out voices, movements, stage pictures, and the like. If possible the actual furniture and other properties should be used; chairs and sofas should be checked for height, width, and depth; the actors should try sitting down on them and getting up; chairs that are to be moved should be moved to see if they are light enough; hand props should be tried out to see if they can be managed; even costumes and make-up should be tried out if important or difficult effects are to depend upon them in any way—although it is not essential, of course, that all these things be done at the same rehearsal.

In short, it should be the object of the director in the first half dozen rehearsals to make sure, first, that nothing is being learned wrong, and second, that no actor is left in doubt or uncertainty as to what he is to learn, especially in respect to the teamwork. The next step is the consideration of the meaning and interpretation of the play in detail.

#### REHEARSING FOR MEANING

Professional actors frequently jump to conclusions about the interpretation much too early, especially when they work from sides instead of books. From the sides each actor studies only his own part, and being eager to make the most of it he begins to feel for the mood of the part before he is at all sure of the mood of the play; and he begins to read meanings into his lines which may or may not have been intended by the author. Experienced amateurs occasionally display the same trait, and the director must be on his guard against it.

For the most part, however, the problem in amateur production is to get the actors to pay sufficient attention to the meaning early enough in the process, and to assimilate the meaning well enough for reasonable



freedom of interpretation. Beginners are apt to feel a bit dazed at the first two or three rehearsals. Groping vaguely for their positions on the stage and striving to remember the instructions given them, they are in no mental condition to appreciate fine shades of meaning. Even actors of some experience feel the confusion and uncertainty, and it is not uncommon to find them at the fourth or fifth rehearsal still speaking their lines with a dismal lack of understanding.

Before any errors of interpretation can become fixed, the director should begin an intensive study of meaning, quizzing and challenging the actors repeatedly at all doubtful points. When a line does not come easily he may ask the actor to explain it in his own words, or to substitute his own words, temporarily. Or he may ask specific and troublesome questions about the line: Is it a serious line? Is it humorous? Is it satirical? Has it a double meaning? Is it charged with emotion? If so, what emotion? Is it an essential line for the audience to get? Is it a laugh line? Does it call for an answer? If so, in what mood is the answer to be awaited? Is the wording especially typical of the character? If so, in what way? If the line is a long one, how can it be broken up? What changes of tempo can be used? What bits of business? How, in general, can the meaning be enriched without strain or false emphasis?

Every now and then a line turns up which is completely baffling to the actor; he seems utterly unable to grasp the meaning or to express it by his reading. In such cases the director faces a difficult question: assuming that he understands the line himself, should he give the actor the correct reading and seek to have him imitate it? This is the question discussed at some length in the last chapter, and the answer would seem to be that the director should do all in his power to suggest the real meaning of the line to the actor, whether by demonstration or by discussion, but should rigidly check any tendency on the part of the actor to rely upon a mere echo of the director's reading. Now and then an actor will be found who cannot, or will not, learn in any other way; the best remedy in such cases is probably homicide, though if no understudy is available it may be unwise to apply it until after the performance.

To illuminate a line for the actor's better comprehension the director must sometimes resort to the device of "bridging"—that is, interpolating an explanatory passage in such a way that the meaning of the original line will become clear. The following examples illustrate how this may be

done, and also show how many different meanings may be drawn from an apparently commonplace line:

1. We must not forget.  
*We* must not forget (, though others may).  
 (To forget would be suicidal;) we *must* not forget.  
 (They count on our forgetting, but) we must *not* forget.  
 (We may forgive, but) we must not *forget*.
2. How many?  
 (I know you want some, but) how *many*?  
 (There are many, of course, but) *how* many?  
 (What's that you say?) *How* many?
3. I don't know how.  
 (Why ask me?) *I* don't know how.  
 (You say I know how, but) I *don't* know how.  
 I don't *know* how (, but I can learn).  
 (I'd do it if I could, but) I don't know *how*.

It is, as a matter of fact, the apparently commonplace line that causes most of the trouble. The unusual line challenges attention and dictates its own inflections, while the commonplace line which has several possible meanings is as likely to get the wrong inflection as the right, and so to convey a wrong meaning or no meaning at all.

When bridging is used, the actor sometimes catches the meaning immediately, gives the line its proper inflection, and has no further trouble. More often he must repeat the bridging with the line—either mentally or aloud—at a half dozen rehearsals before it begins to sink in. In the latter case the device is of questionable value, especially if the actor shows a tendency to revert as soon as he drops the interpolated line, or to have difficulty in dropping it. On the whole it is best to avoid too much mechanism in rehearsal, and if bridging fails to bring almost instantaneous results it is better to abandon it and try something else. In any case the director should make sure that all interpolated phrases not to be retained as part of the text are dropped out before the polishing rehearsals begin.

In all study of meaning the director should bear in mind the construction and theme of the play as a whole, and should guard against the actor's tendency to interpret individual lines irrelevantly. Very early in rehearsals he should begin to emphasize the varying moods of the different acts, and to point out that a line correctly interpreted one way in Act One might bear a very different interpretation in Act Three. This is a diffi-

culty which amateurs find it very hard to master; the constant rotation of acts in rehearsal confuses them, and they cannot remember what the characters they represent are supposed to know, or not to know, at each point in the action. Accurate study of the meaning and mood of each line in a play calls for an alertness of mind and an unceasing vigilance scarcely comprehensible to those who have not tried it.

### MEMORIZATION

At what point in the preparation of a play should memorization begin, and at what point should the director require his actors to be "letter perfect"?

To answer these questions properly one must first understand that there are two distinct methods of memorization, and that the answer is not the same for both. By the one method the act of memorizing is made a purely mechanical process having no relation to the study of meaning; the two things are, so to speak, carried on independently by two separate portions of the mind. By the other method the words, actions, and meanings are memorized coordinately, and all associations built up from the start.

The first method is employed by a great many professionals as a matter of choice, and is almost essential in stock-company work when a new play must be learned every week with only three or four rehearsals. It has one important advantage: the memorizing may be done early and quickly—even before the first rehearsal—and the actor need not be hampered at rehearsal by the necessity of carrying a book and reading his part. But to use the method successfully the actor must be able to separate the memorization from the interpretation, and to refrain from forming any impressions during the memorization which he may have to unlearn later. No actor can do this without some experience, and many can never learn to do it. Moreover, those who succeed in memorizing mechanically are not always able to throw off the mechanical effect when they come to interpret. On the whole the method is to be recommended only when circumstances necessitate a very hasty production, or when the actors happen to be fitted for it by temperament and experience.

The second method is the better one for those who have time to learn a play slowly and thoroughly, and is the only one suitable for beginners.

By it the interpretation precedes the memorization, and lines, business, and meaning are memorized together. The advantage lies in the fact that nothing is learned incorrectly or mechanically, and that the elements of acting are coordinated from the start. The disadvantage lies in the impediment put upon the early rehearsals by the actors' dependence upon their books, and the consequent delay in reaching the polishing stage. By this method it is obvious that memorization cannot even begin until the meaning and the action are understood.

To answer our questions, then, we may say that when the mechanical method is used the memorization should begin with the distribution of parts, and the actors should be letter perfect at the second or third rehearsal; but when the associative method is used they should not begin to memorize until absolutely sure of meaning, movement, and business. They should be letter perfect as soon after that as possible.

Some actors have a good deal of trouble with memorization, and some make themselves a nuisance by pretending to know their parts before they do know them, thereby overworking the prompter and disrupting the rehearsals. Often, of course, the failure to memorize is referable to mere laziness or procrastination, or to a lack of will power; but when an actor who really tries hard is unable to memorize, it is commonly because of a tendency to straddle between the two methods. Seeking to memorize the words he allows himself to be distracted and delayed by considerations of meaning; or seeking to study the meaning he tries too hard to memorize at the same time, and the memory process interferes with the thinking process. It is better to do one thing or the other. If the mechanical method is to be used he should rigorously shut out of his mind all thought of the meaning, all play of imagination, establishing visual or auditory images rather than ideas. Sides are better than books for this kind of study, which is why stock-trained professionals so often prefer them. But if the associative method is to be used the actor should not hurry or force the process. He should get at the memorization through the understanding, assimilating the meaning and action so well as to remember them subconsciously and involuntarily. The mechanical method may be practiced in an armchair, or the actor may pace aimlessly up and down as he commits the lines; but the associative method is best practiced in actual rehearsal, and even when studying at home the actor should speak the

lines aloud with the proper expression and should move about as on the stage, rehearsing the actions with the lines. When lack of privacy makes this procedure impossible, he should try to do it in imagination.

In memorization, more than in any other phase of play production, the youngsters have the advantage. It is the older, and especially the elderly, men and women who find it hard to remember their lines, and who forget them in actual performance—although with professionals the facility born of experience often compensates for the difficulties arising from increasing age. It seems especially hard for elderly amateurs to coordinate lines and movement and to remember them together, and the director must often devote hours of extra rehearsal to drilling such actors. It is usually best to rehearse them by short scenes, going over and over each scene until the coordination becomes subconscious. The greatest difficulty is ordinarily met with when the intervals between rehearsals are long, and when the actors in question have only occasional speeches as part of the ensemble. The poise of these older actors is often valuable to an amateur company, but to get the best out of them without making everybody else nervous at their uncertainty requires patience and skill on the part of the director.

All actors have more or less trouble with the memorization of parallel passages or passages having similar associations. For example, if Smith and Jones converse about Brown in Act One, with Smith standing at stage right and Jones sitting at stage left, and then converse in much the same way in Act Three, a single wrong line in Act One may start them off on the scene that belongs in Act Three. Many of the serious disasters in amateur performances result from such transposition of lines. The director should guard against this, first, by arranging different movements and positions for parallel passages (except when symbolism requires similar movements and positions), and later by checking up such passages to see that the actors are keeping them straight. When the actors show any tendency to transpose lines, he should point out to them the differences rather than the similarities, and should try to establish contrasting associations in their minds as mnemonic aids. A little ingenuity will solve the problem if applied in time.

No single recipe or formula for successful memorization can be laid down, and actors of different temperaments will swear by different methods. But one general principle is always sound, and that is the principle

of kinesthetic coordination—coordination in the sensations of activity involved in expression. The actor who acts all over remembers his lines more surely and with less conscious effort than the one who memorizes a page of print and then reads it off from a visual image alone. As indicated in an earlier chapter, he is also more convincing.



## *Rehearsal: Polishing*

IT IS an unfortunate fact that most amateur productions never get any real polishing. The chief reason for this is that the learning process has a way of drawing itself out indefinitely; the play never seems quite ready for polishing, and the director postpones the latter until it is too late. There is only one way to overcome the difficulty, and that is to announce certain rehearsals as polishing rehearsals, and to carry them out as such no matter how many details of study and experiment have to be left unfinished.

A professional producer planning a New York opening often relies upon public performances in a "dog town" to do the necessary polishing for him, and there can be no doubt that actual performance before an audience brings, by compulsion, a kind of polish that cannot be attained in any other way. When a play opens with two performances in Wilmington or New Haven, plays another week in Baltimore, and two weeks in Philadelphia before going to Broadway, the so-called "first-nighters" can expect to see a fairly smooth performance. But as amateurs seldom give more than three or four performances of a play altogether, they cannot very well depend upon this sort of polishing. As a rule they must expect to be judged upon the merits of the very first performance—sometimes the only one. Any polishing that is to be done under these circumstances must be done in rehearsal.

The presence of an interested "gallery" at the polishing rehearsals is a fairly good substitute when trial performances are impossible. An invited audience at the final rehearsal is nearly always advisable. The designation of certain rehearsals as "speed rehearsals" or "continuity rehearsals" serves to concentrate energy upon the polishing, and the elimination of unnecessary interruptions and unnecessary prompting helps to keep the emphasis. Sometimes it is a good plan to banish the prompter altogether. It is said that Augustin Daly purposely employed a French-

man as prompter; the actors could not understand what the man said, and so were forced to know their lines. Any device that will exert upon the actors some of the pressure of a public performance is likely to be an aid in polishing.

#### SPEEDING THE DIALOGUE

One of the chief problems in polishing is the problem of speed. Amateur performances nearly always drag. The actual dialogue moves too slowly, and the chief causes are inadequate memorization and tardiness in taking up cues.

Inadequate memorization may be a matter of incorrect method, as discussed in the last chapter, or of inability to articulate lines and business, or of pure neglect. The fact that amateurs really can memorize if they are put to it is well demonstrated whenever there happens to be a keen competition under the tryout system. But with the best of intentions many amateurs totally underestimate the degree of memorization required for freedom in acting. They suppose it sufficient to be able to recite the lines at home without marked hesitation or serious error. Experienced actors know that the real study just about begins at this point; and the less experience an actor has the better he must know his lines to achieve an equal degree of freedom. Sometimes the best thing a director can do to make the polishing process effective is to scare, or shame, or cajole the actors into studying their parts all over again.

Nearly all amateurs are slow about taking up their cues. First Brown speaks his line, pronounces the cue, and waits. There is a perceptible pause. Then Smith wakes up, and answers. In real life we do not waste time in this way; we pause only when there is some uncertainty about the answer, or some need for special emphasis, or when action intervenes. In the ordinary run of real conversation we make our answers promptly, often slightly anticipating each other's conclusions, and sometimes frankly interrupting in our eagerness to get ahead with the thought. Stage dialogue should proceed in the same way; if anything it should move more rapidly than in real life, since art is selective and does not attempt to represent all the clumsiness and accident and friction of reality.

Perhaps the chief reason why amateurs are slow about taking up cues—aside from insufficient study—is their tendency to literalness. The book gives a certain word or phrase as the cue; therefore the actor waits until



he has heard that word or phrase before beginning his line. And since it takes him a perceptible fraction of a second to hear and recognize the cue and to respond—even when he knows his lines well—there is a hiatus in the dialogue, not very marked in itself, but serious enough when it is repeated several hundred times in one play.

An experienced actor, or an actor properly directed, overcomes this tendency by a slight overlapping of line and cue. Instead of waiting for the last word of the preceding speech he takes as his cue the second or third word from the end, and so begins to speak almost at the instant his colleague ceases speaking—perhaps even a fraction of a second before. As a general rule this produces the effect of a smooth and continuous conversation. Of course it may be overdone, and snappy professionals sometimes reel off their dialogue with so much rapidity and so much overlapping as to make the whole performance mechanical and unconvincing. Moderation is the best rule; but moderation for most amateurs means more, not less, speed.

The extent to which overlapping is permissible with any given line depends upon the meaning. When the meaning of the line is not complete until the last word is uttered, the actor who is to reply should wait for that word; but when the meaning becomes clear some time before the last word he may safely anticipate a little and begin his line. Even in such cases, too much or too frequent overlapping suggests impatience and impoliteness on the part of the character, and should be avoided unless these qualities are to be portrayed. The actor should consider carefully the mood of the character, and his relation to the other characters. A character in a thoughtful or absent mood will be slower in response than a wide-awake, eager, or impatient character, or one who is in a hurry to end the conversation or turn it into another channel. A polite or deferential character will make prompt replies, but will not anticipate or interrupt. A master may interrupt a servant, but a servant may not interrupt his master without suggesting impertinence; all differences in age, social position, or official responsibility call for similar variations.

#### BROKEN LINES

A very marked interruption is usually indicated by the dramatist with the aid of a broken line and a dash. The broken line, however, sometimes makes trouble for the amateur actor, and occasions a special type of

delay. When Brown's line is broken and Smith is supposed to interrupt him, Brown stops abruptly at the dash and waits for the interruption which he too evidently knows—or hopes—is coming; Smith, on the other hand, waits until he hears Brown stop, and then opens his mouth to speak. Brown, of course, should be taught to speak as if he had every expectation of finishing the sentence—should in fact, be taught to finish it unflinchingly in the event of Smith's failure to interrupt; while Smith should be taught to take his cue a word or two earlier and get started in time to interrupt at the exact point indicated by the dramatist. Even when the interruption takes place on schedule, Brown should be taught to think through the rest of his line, or at least a few words of it—a nice little point in acting that some professionals neglect. Broken lines cause no end of trouble, and do much to make amateur acting unconvincing, and for that reason they should be most carefully timed and rehearsed.

Another source of delay is to be found in the entrance and exit cues. Here again it is the tendency to literalness that causes most of the trouble. When Brown and Smith are talking and Jones is to join them, the dramatist usually finishes a speech by Smith or Brown and then writes, "Enter Jones." The literal-minded actor waits in the wings until he hears the last word of the cue speech and then starts on; but as it takes him a few seconds to cover the intervening fifteen or twenty feet, Smith and Brown have to stand around doing nothing until Jones arrives. The actor should determine by study the exact point in the dialogue at which he is to arrive at a certain spot on the stage, and then take a cue sufficiently in advance of that to get him there in time. Amateurs rehearsing in parlors and living rooms are apt to forget the greater distances of the real stage, and especially the three or four steps which they must usually take off stage before coming into full view of the audience. All exits and entrances should be carefully timed by the director at the first stage rehearsal—which should be held as early as possible for this if for no other reason—and then carefully rechecked in the polishing rehearsals. In most instances they will need constant speeding up. Poorly timed entrances and exits will make an otherwise good performance seem very crude and unfinished.

#### CADENCE

Inexperienced actors should be frequently cautioned against depending for the timing upon the inspiration of the moment—even when they know

their lines perfectly. Once the correct timing is determined for a given line it should be rehearsed again and again, so that the actor will remember not only the words and meaning but the rhythm and cadence as well. Perfect cadence teaches a platoon of soldiers to respond automatically to orders, and helps a motorist to change gears or apply the brakes instinctively and accurately, even in emergency. In the same way it helps the actor to remember his line through bodily coordination rather than through mental effort; it helps, in other words, to educate the motor responses, and insure the actor against the effects of excitement. The conscious mind is too variable and too easily distracted to be entirely trustworthy, but the motor responses, properly trained, can be depended upon.

It is a good plan to memorize each cue as if it were part of the line, running the two together mentally until the cadence is established. Lines that have a strong natural cadence are more readily memorized and retained, and less apt to get out of timing. Actors generally take up their cues more promptly in verse than in prose, for if the poet has been sufficiently skillful the meter itself suggests the proper timing.

#### EASING THE DIALOGUE

After the dialogue has been speeded up sufficiently it is still apt to remain artificial and unconvincing. Amateurs are inclined to deliver their lines as if they were reading instead of speaking; there is no illusion because there is no conversational quality.

The conversational quality is hard to define, yet it is one of the most essential elements in good acting. It does not necessarily include naturalism, or conversational style. A natural or commonplace style would just about ruin a poetic or symbolic play; the characters of classic drama are not everyday persons, and their speech is a matter of poetic convention rather than reality. Yet even in poetic plays the characters who address each other must seem to be *speaking*, rather than reading or reciting. The most heroic language can be made to sound convincing if the actors are able to speak it with directness and imagination.

A good conversational quality includes, of course, such physical matters as variation of tempo, promptness in taking up cues, articulation of speech with action and gesture, significant use of pauses, live facial expression, and active vocal tone. But the essential element is imagination.

The actor must have imagination in order to realize the feelings of the

character he portrays, to grasp the implications of plot and situation, and to feel a sense of communication with the other characters. Moreover it must be the right sort of imagination. A good reader may have imagination, and yet be unmistakably a reader rather than an actor. The reader's imagination is, in a sense, detached and objective. He preserves his æsthetic distance as one of the audience, and is not part of the play. The actor is part of the play, and his imagination must be of the subjective kind, enabling him to believe in himself as a character in the play and to address the other characters as if he were speaking, not at, but to them.

How to stimulate the imagination is not so easily told. Questioning helps, especially when the characters are questioned about their thoughts and feelings: "Where are you going?" "What brought you here?" "What room did you come from?" "Which act is this?" "Has such-and-such an event happened yet?" "Have we passed the climax?" "Are you pleased about it? Annoyed? Alarmed? Puzzled? Surprised? Indignant?" Addressing the actors as *characters* rather than as actors also helps the imagination. Costume and make-up rehearsals help—or better, full dress rehearsals with scenery, lights, and properties. But something depends also upon the will power of the actors and no director can provide them with imagination if they lack the will to imagine.

The greatest difficulty in easing the dialogue appears, logically enough, in those passages which are inherently least natural. It is not hard to get natural delivery of colloquial dialogue, full of current slang and commonplace informality. But the moment an actor is required to deliver an extra long speech, or one that is a bit literary in flavor—not to mention one that is stilted, or heroic, or poetic—the trouble begins. Anybody can speak a colloquial phrase in a colloquial way, and anybody can speak a stilted passage in a stilted way. But to speak a heroic or poetic passage with heroic or poetic effect and yet with naturalness and conviction is not so easy; and to speak a really stilted passage in such a way as to conceal the stiltedness and make the speech seem dignified and natural calls for positive genius.

#### OPENING OUT THE LONG SPEECHES

A good director can ease the dialogue for inexperienced actors considerably if he can help them to open out their long speeches, to vary the tempo, and to articulate lines and business.

To open out a long speech it is usually necessary to devise additional business, or at least to suggest some changes of gesture or facial expression; otherwise the pauses will seem artificial and meaningless. Variations of tempo within the sentence do much to break up a speech that is too long, and variations of tempo throughout a stretch of dialogue do much to ease the whole. The variations, however, should not be arbitrary; they should be in keeping with the meaning. Variations of pitch and force are occasionally necessary, but are of less general use than one might suppose. There is plenty of pitch variation in the very reading inflections we are trying to escape, and in the affected or elocutionary style of delivery—so much so that a positively monotonous delivery is sometimes a relief by contrast. Extreme variations of force, on the other hand, are open to the objection that they tax the ear of the listener, and make it difficult for him to hear without strain. Variations of tempo, and of timbre, or quality, are better.

Another matter that sometimes requires attention is the laugh or cry that sounds strained and artificial. If the book says, "Ha, ha!" the actor thinks he has to say "Ha, ha!"—which for him may not be a natural way of laughing at all. Such words are merely a convention by which the dramatist indicates that the character is to laugh, and the director should see to it that the laugh is made natural and convincing in whatever way is best adapted to the capability of the actor and the needs of the characterization. Sometimes that will mean an attitude, a facial expression, or a bit of business instead of a loud laugh, or in addition to it. It is usually best to keep the laughter and the weeping well within the bounds of moderation; amateurs have a tendency to overdo both.

The problem of easing the dialogue calls for some rather heroic and intensive work, even in the last stages of rehearsal. In the case of particularly refractory passages it may be necessary to resort to bridging or paraphrasing of some sort, or to actual modifications of text. General rehearsals should not be too frequently interrupted for this sort of work; the result would be confusion rather than polish. Instead the bad spots should be noted in passing, and worked out in special rehearsals or private conferences. As many as possible should be worked out in the earlier rehearsals; but often the difficulties do not become apparent until polishing has begun.

## POINTING UP

In spite of careful planning it will often be found that certain portions of the play fail to work up properly, and seem, in the later rehearsals, to lack point. Significant lines are delivered too casually, and escape notice; lines that should be theatrically effective seem to fall flat, and humorous lines fail to get laughs. It is always difficult to know how much of this is due to the lack of a proper audience and will correct itself in performance; laugh lines, especially, often fail to amuse the director and the cast, but succeed very well with the first audience. The presence of a few strangers at each rehearsal makes it easier to determine which lines need pointing up.

In general, lines that are highly dramatic or theatrical in effect, or that convey strong passion or emotion are likely to come up very well in the mounting excitement of actual performance; while smart lines, farcical lines, and broad character lines—especially in dialect—are likely to need toning down. Lines that are subtle but significant, lines that “plant” ideas necessary to the plot, satirical lines, and high-comedy lines are the ones most likely to need pointing up. Lines that are to convey repressed emotion sometimes require a combined treatment—a somewhat excessive pointing up, followed by a careful toning down.

The method to be used in pointing up will vary according to the nature of the fault to be overcome. When a line is delivered too casually it is sometimes because the actor himself has failed to realize its significance, and the remedy may lie in pointing it out to him. When a line that ought to convey a great thought or feeling fails to strike fire it may be the actor’s imagination which is at fault; or it may be the teamwork, or the director’s own work in planning movement or business for emphasis. The distribution of emphasis is supposed to be taken care of in the planning and the early rehearsals, and when it needs attention in the polishing stage it is because something has gone wrong. The problem is to find out what, and how, and to correct it.

It is important to remember that the pointing up of a line does not always rest solely with the actor who delivers it. No matter how well a line is spoken, it may fall flat if the listening actors do not play up. It is always harder for amateurs to listen effectively than to speak effectively,

harder to keep still than to move about. Yet the slightest irrelevant movement at the instant an important line is spoken may ruin its effectiveness; and the slightest tendency of the listening actor to drop out of character may spoil some other actor's best line—a fact which is occasionally turned to account by a jealous actor eager to take unfair advantage of a rival.

Too much pointing up is as bad as too little and results in what is generally called "playing to the gallery." The deliberate attempt which some actors and directors make to evoke direct applause for a line is usually not good art, because it is destructive of æsthetic distance. Any attempt to get a laugh which is recognized as such by the audience tends to defeat its own purpose, and even to give pain instead of pleasure. Nevertheless, some pointing up is sure to be necessary, and when the dramatist's purpose is to give pleasure through laughter it is the director's business to see that the actors get the laughs.

#### GETTING THE LAUGHS

When a laugh line misses fire it is usually from one of two causes: lack of appreciation on the part of the actor, or faulty technique.

Lack of appreciation in this connection does not necessarily mean stupidity; nor does it mean absence of a sense of humor. Indeed, one often finds it among the most intelligent beginners, and those with the keenest sense of humor off stage. It is the "comedy sense" that is lacking—a very different thing from the sense of humor.

The comedy sense is easily recognizable in those who have it but very hard to define. The sense of humor is subjective. The comedy sense is *projective*. To appreciate humor subjectively one must possess a sense of values and must be quick to note relations and catch implications; at the same time he must preserve an attitude of detachment. To enact comedy one must arouse empathy in others, while seemingly not implicated himself. He must preserve their æsthetic distance and his own as well, but the two must be different. The comedy sense, more than any other phase of the actor's art, implies a dual psychology. But of that, more in the next chapter.

As for technique, the most important point is to avoid killing the laugh at the moment of its inception. Too often the actor spoils a good laugh by dropping the voice just as the point is reached, or by turning away, or

by executing a sudden movement which distracts attention, or by failing to give the audience time to laugh. Since the most effective humor is conveyed to the audience by half-concealed means it is necessary as a rule for the actor to be well down stage and facing front when he speaks his line, in order that the audience may see his face and detect that subtle something which reveals the comic element; also that they may witness his ostensible effort to conceal his own appreciation and remain in character. Laugh lines are seldom effective when the actor turns away from the audience. When Smith is talking to Jones, if Smith faces Jones and Jones faces front, Smith's funny line will fall flat—unless the humor lies in the *effect* of that line on Jones and Jones registers clearly. When the humor is in the line itself, Smith should face front to speak it while Jones faces him. This is a good general rule, though it should not be applied too sweepingly or too mechanically.

The tendency of the inexperienced actor is to drop the emphasis too quickly at the end of a line, to turn away too quickly, or even to stop acting and drop out of character. He should be taught to "follow through," as the golfer puts it—that is, to keep up the tension at the end of each line and go on acting out the thought just as vividly after the last word as before. Audiences are usually a little uncertain whether to laugh or not, but inclined to do what is expected of them; and if the actor speaks what would seem to be a funny line but turns away casually at the end, as if he did not expect a laugh, they are quite likely to restrain themselves and perhaps to suspect themselves of having misunderstood the thought. They are eager enough to laugh if given a chance, but the actor must give them the chance.

He must also give them the time. When he hurries on to the next line the stupid listeners will not get the point and the clever ones will choke back the laugh in order to hear the next line. Now and then it may be good policy, with a succession of funny lines, to hurry the audience a little in order to pile up a cumulative effect, but this will only work when the humorous element is in crescendo. The listeners will not enjoy holding back a hearty laugh for the sake of a more moderate one. If the pace is just right so that every point is clear, and there is just time for the listener to begin a laugh and then catch his breath for a better one, the result is sometimes worth the risk. As a general rule, however, the actor should be taught to "hold everything" after a humorous line until the laughter



subsides; and should be warned at rehearsals to be ready for unexpected laughter at the public performance.

The technique of getting laughs is thus largely negative—a matter of not doing the wrong thing. There is, however, one constructive element which deserves mention, and that is the skillful use of a pause just before the main point is reached. Mark Twain's famous essay on *How to Tell a Humorous Story* emphasizes this element, and much of what he says in that essay is valuable to the actor. The pause serves to some extent as a conventional symbol labeling the laugh line as such; but its chief function is that of intensifying the suspense. It creates a little element of surprise, and at the same time lessens the chance of confusion or misunderstanding; but it must be correctly timed and there is no rule for timing it. The timing of pauses, in this and other connections, should be given careful attention in the polishing rehearsals.<sup>1</sup>

#### REHEARSING FOR SMOOTHNESS

While attention to detail is a necessary part of the polishing, too much of it at the expense of continuity will tend to make the performance ragged rather than smooth. To guard against this it is a good plan to devote some rehearsals entirely to the cultivation of smoothness. If time permits, it may pay to run several of them as regular performances, with no interruptions and no criticisms. If time is short, much the same result may be attained by omitting the interruptions but retaining the criticisms. These may be set down in writing and distributed between acts or between rehearsals; or they may be given after the manner of side-line coaching. For this the actors must be taught to go right on playing while the director shouts occasional comments at them—a difficult matter for beginners, who are easily distracted by criticisms and likely to forget their lines and stop. When the actors have learned the trick, and can stay in character while making mental notes, the director can conduct his rehearsals as an orchestra leader conducts a concert, and can do a good deal of coaching without loss of smoothness.

In rehearsals for smoothness the more general problems of emphasis, tone, mood, and tempo should be given the major consideration, and individual criticisms kept to a minimum, although individual actors may

<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed study of the technique of laugh lines, see Dolman, "A Laugh Analysis of *The School for Scandal*," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, November, 1930.

occasionally be reminded of points previously discussed with them. "Watch that turn!" the director may say to an actor who usually turns the wrong way on a certain line; or "There you go again!" or "Better that time!" The favorite remark of one successful director, always spoken in cheerful tones, is "Rotten—go on!" The actor goes on, but he remembers that spot in the next rehearsal and tries to do better. Not all of the comments given in this rapid-fire way bear fruit, but if detailed rehearsals or special rehearsals of troublesome scenes are sandwiched in between the rehearsals for smoothness, the general plan will, as a rule, be effective.

In regulating the emphasis the director should see that the main climax is sufficiently vigorous, and that no sub-climax is confused with it and given too much emphasis. He should caution the actors who have heavy scenes late in the play not to outdo themselves in the first act, but to hold some of their powers in reserve. He should see that the relative emphasis of the several acts is properly preserved, and that the climactic effect within each act is properly worked up.

In regulating the tempo he should see that the casual moments are not allowed to drag and that impressive moments are not unduly hurried. At the same time he should see that expository passages are played deliberately enough to be clear, and that the rushes of action approaching the climaxes are sufficiently spirited. In some instances he will be able to discern characteristic rhythms in certain scenes, and to adjust the tempo in such a way as to bring these out. Secondly he should see that the tempo is varied enough to avoid monotony.

In regulating the tone and mood he should look for two things: the characteristic mood of each scene, and any contrast of mood that may exist between different characters in the same scene. Harmonization of these two things is not always easy. There may be one melancholy character in a rollicking scene; and to bring out both moods in contrast without destroying the unity of the larger requires a nice sense of balance. Toward the end of the rehearsal period the actors are apt to become a little weary of the play, and so to lose their sensitivity to mood; and the director will find that they need constant reminding on this point. The continuity rehearsal accompanied by coaching without interruption is much more effective in regulating the mood than intensive rehearsal with frequent interruptions.

## THE DRESS REHEARSAL

The so-called dress rehearsal is one of the cherished traditions of the theatre, but as ordinarily conducted it is pretty demoralizing. The trouble is that two quite different purposes are confused, with the result that neither is fully accomplished.

Theoretically the dress rehearsal is a complete rehearsal with full equipment, run without interruption and intended to be as nearly like an actual performance as possible. In this sense it is the final step in the process of rehearsal, and is naturally scheduled for the last available date before the public performance. Unfortunately it is also, as a rule, the first tryout of scenery, properties, costumes, and make-up, and as such is anything but a polishing rehearsal; it is an experimental rehearsal of the most rudimentary sort, and it usually goes to pieces, leaving the actors with the feeling that the play is only half learned on the day before the opening. True, the fright sometimes induces them to work a little harder in the few remaining hours, and the performance turns out better than expected; but that is no defense of a bad system.

The logical procedure is to try out the scenery, lighting, costumes, and make-up early in the experimental rehearsals—not necessarily all at once, but in plenty of time to make adjustments. If the equipment is hard for the actors to manage in any way it should be used at a number of rehearsals, some early, some late, so that the “dress” part of the play gets its polishing gradually along with the lines and action. When this is done a full dress rehearsal at the end is no longer a mere experiment, and can serve its proper purpose as a polishing rehearsal.

Sometimes, to be sure, this arrangement is not entirely possible. The equipment, or part of it, may not be available until the last rehearsal. When this is the case it is best to abandon frankly the idea of a smooth dress rehearsal and to rehearse only those portions of the play which involve the use of equipment. If possible the stage crew should be rehearsed in handling the scenery and properties before the actors are asked to rehearse with them. If the one experimental rehearsal can be held two days before the performance instead of one day, it may be followed by a continuity rehearsal either with or without the costumes; such a rehearsal helps to restore the smoothness so often shattered by the confusion of the so-called dress rehearsal.

The important point is to distinguish the two purposes; to accomplish the experimental purpose as early as possible; to work for polishing toward the end, and to make the final rehearsal a good topping-off rehearsal whether a full dress rehearsal or not.

#### STUDYING THE AUDIENCE

As already suggested, the last stage of polishing is that of actual performance, with the audience as collaborator. In this stage all sorts of unexpected things happen. Audiences are not passive, but active; they contribute their own imaginations as colored by their experiences. Sometimes they show real creative power, and more than one dramatist has expressed the thought that a play is not finished until it has been properly "rewritten" by the audience. Audiences occasionally insist upon an interpretation of some episode, situation, or character, entirely different from the one intended by the actor. Otis Skinner's famous experience in *The Honor of the Family* is a case in point; he did not know he was supposed to be funny until he heard the audience laugh.

This raises the question of whether the actor, author, and director should aim to give the people what they want, or make them take what is good for them. Is the actor properly the "servant" of the public, as it is so often put? The Elizabethan actor undoubtedly so regarded himself, and his point of view has been more or less the prevailing one ever since. "We aim to please, and hope you will like us" is, and in a sense has to be, the motto of professional entertainers everywhere. On the other hand some producers, following Gordon Craig, take the position that the actor, or the director working through the actor, should be an independent interpretative artist, catering to no one, and letting the audience pick up the pearls or leave them as they choose.

In this, as in so many other things, the truth lies somewhere between the two extremes. The attitude of the Elizabethan actor was inherited from the strolling players and minstrels who preceded him—mere vagabond entertainers, living on the bounty of their occasional patrons, and proud to be retained from time to time as actual servants to this or that nobleman. While the social status of professional actors has been steadily improving, something of the menial attitude has survived and has hampered the development of a dignified independent spirit. Worse even than the menial attitude is the purely commercial attitude which too often

replaces it, and which is seen in its most vicious form today in the manager who panders to the lowest public taste and the actor who "plays to the gallery." From an artistic point of view there can be no defense of such truckling.

But to suppose that the proper alternative is a lofty disregard of the audience is to ignore the psychological fact that the most sincere creative effort is meaningless except in terms of its effect upon others. A painting is but a mixture of chemicals on canvas; its effectiveness as an object of art is in the thought or emotion it engenders in the observer. A piece of music is but a vibration of the atmosphere; its beauty is in the ear of the listener. In the same way a play is not what is written on paper or what is done on the stage, but what takes place in the imagination of the audience. It is right that the actor should try to guide that imagination to the appreciation of the best, but this can be done only through a sympathetic understanding of audience response. "You must make your audience act for you," said Salvini. But to do so you must first bring what you have to offer within their experience and comprehension.

The study of the audience should begin, of course, long before the first performance. The director, like the dramatist, should learn to know the tendencies of audiences in general, and which tendencies are most subject to variation. He should determine, if possible, for what type of audience he is preparing his production, and what limitations he must meet. He should prepare to meet the most probable emergencies, and should have his actors prepare.

#### WHAT AUDIENCES LIKE

Nearly all audiences demand surprise, suspense, action, love interest, something to root for, something to hate, something to laugh at, something to sympathize with, some satisfaction of poetic justice, and a chance to feel that they have understood the dramatist with remarkable sagacity. These things are as much the director's concern as the dramatist's, since it is the director who is responsible for the final contact with the audience.

Surprise need not always be sharp or startling, but a little of it now and then is needed to freshen interest; it may come at almost any appropriate point in the play, early or late. Suspense, however, must begin early. Unless an audience is in some way made anxious before the conclusion of

the first act the succeeding acts are pretty sure to fall flat. Action is needed to freshen interest, and also to act empathically as a relief valve for the motor activities of the audience.

Love interest is of many kinds, and romantic love is not the only kind that appeals to an audience; but very seldom does a play without any love interest at all prove satisfying. Professor Quinn, in his *History of the American Drama from the Civil War*, has pointed out that the wide appeal of *Abie's Irish Rose* may be partly due to the fact that it has almost every conceivable kind of love in it—romantic, conjugal, filial, parental, grandparental, and altruistic—and that the audience is permitted to sympathize with all of them at once. In working up the love interest the director must keep constantly in mind the probable empathic responses of his audience, and must not ask them to empathize in impossible situations or impossible people.

The instinct to take sides is bred into the very nature of the human animal; it is part of his pugnacious disposition. Children always want to take sides, to root for some hero, or country, or idea; and grown people, despite their restraints, crave the same right. Audiences cannot comprehend neutrality, or empathize in a neutral character—which is why some indeterminate problem plays fail in popular appeal. The director, as far as the dramatist permits him to do so, should leave his audiences in no doubt as to where their sympathies and loyalties belong.

The appeal of alternate laughter and tears—of what Belasco calls the “emotional alternating current”—is very well known, and some dramatists and producers make a fetish of it. In nineteenth-century plays like *The Old Homestead* it was very much overdone, and second-rate actors of the older generation are apt to carry it to absurd extremes whenever the opportunity offers. Yet within proper limits it is a legitimate and very effective appeal. The director should study carefully the transitions, and make sure that they are neither too sudden nor too obvious.

As for the community of understanding between the dramatist and the audience, some producers think it the most important appeal. People like to be taken into the confidence of the author. They do not mind being fooled now and then within the rules of the game—in a mystery play, for example—but for the most part they like to feel a sort of superior intelligence in understanding what the author means without being told,

and in perceiving or foreseeing what the characters do *not* perceive or foresee. This involves the matter of dual personality in acting, to be considered in the next chapter.

There are limits to all things, and the director should see that these various appeals are not all made at once in too hectic a fashion. That master showman Dion Boucicault put a great deal of wisdom in two sentences when he said to Clara Morris a half-century ago: "Never rack your audience. Touch 'em—thrill 'em—chill 'em—but never s-t-r-a-i-n 'em."

### HOW AUDIENCES DIFFER

In studying the particular audience for which he is preparing a production the director should consider its probable social,\* racial, and national characteristics, creed, occupation, degree of intellectuality, education, sophistication, and experience in playgoing. He should consider also whether it is likely to include an unusual proportion of men, or of women, or of children; whether it is likely to be familiar with the play in advance; and whether it is likely to be critical in its attitude. Audiences differ greatly in these and many other respects.

It is amazing what different audiences one can see in New York City alone. At a matinee performance of Clemence Dane's *Will Shakespeare*, years ago, I saw an audience of elderly and middle-aged persons, chiefly white-haired ladies, whose refined speech and settled manner suggested a Colonial heritage. In the evening of the same day, at a performance of the German expressionistic play *Johannes Kreisler*, I saw an audience of swarthy, unwashed "intelligentsia." Leaving the theatre I ran into a crowd of overdressed big-town sports and their country cousins, coming from the latest musical revue at an adjoining theatre. And the next afternoon, way over on the East Side, I sat in the Neighborhood Playhouse—now, alas! but a memory—with the most cosmopolitan, most intelligent, and most genuinely appreciative audience I have ever seen.

The same differences, in lesser degree, may be found in other cities, together with local differences too numerous to mention. Local interests and local prejudices must be reckoned with, and accepted as natural limitations. Many plays that succeed in New York fail on the road, and vice versa. The director cannot always change the appeal of the play, but he can often modify it by slight cuttings, changes of emphasis, or

modulations of mood. Small-town audiences generally respond better than metropolitan audiences to romantic appeal, or to the appeal of the moral. They are as a rule, less jaded, and less insistent upon smartness or novelty. But they do not respond as well to subtleties of humor or satire, especially the latter. Little-theatre audiences are sometimes community audiences, drawn together by gregarious instinct or civic spirit rather than by a real love of art; and in such cases they are far less discriminating than the patrons of the commercial theatre.

In most American audiences—except at the motion pictures—there are more women than men; and matinees, especially midweek matinees, are very largely patronized by women. Women, as a rule, yield themselves more completely to the illusion of a play, and are less sensitive to æsthetic distance than men, and more apt to lose it when their own emotions are stirred. They are less restrained than men, and will respond empathically to a much more expressive type of acting—even to what most men would regard as overacting. They are less critical than men on the technical and artistic side, but more critical on the human side. They cannot brook a cold actress, or a cold character. Molnar's *The Swan*, for example, did not appeal to the women, because the heroine was a cold person who allowed romance to escape from her; the romance, too, was made fun of, and that no woman can forgive. Romance is almost sacred; it may be blasted tragically, but it must not be satirized or ridiculed. The empathic responses of the women are naturally quite different from those of men. I recall one play in which the hero, suddenly overcome by filial emotion, kissed his father full in the mouth; the women in the audience burst into spontaneous applause, while the men shuddered. Doubtless the men approved the sentiment, but they could not escape an unpleasant empathy, because men—American men at least—do not make a practice of kissing each other.

Perhaps the most important question for the director to ask himself about the audiences is whether they can be presumed to have seen the play before; or, if it is a new play, whether they can be expected to see several performances or only one. Some plays are like symphonies: they are hard to appreciate on one hearing, but reveal new beauties with each repetition. When the New York Theatre Guild first produced *He Who Gets Slapped* there was a violent controversy about its merits. Mr. Gilbert Emery, himself a dramatist of note as well as an actor and director,



wrote a letter to the *New York Times* in which he condemned the production as baffling and incoherent. He was answered, politely but intolerantly, by Mr. Lee Simonson, scenic artist of the Theatre Guild, by Mr. Richard Bennett, the leading actor in the production, and others, who accused him of being strangely blind to great art. But Mr. Emery had seen the play only once, whereas his opponents had studied it thoroughly and seen many rehearsals and performances. My own impression, on one viewing, was much like Mr. Emery's, and from the blank expressions I saw about me in the audience I am sure most people felt the same way. Doubtless three or four viewings would put most of us on the other side. But how often has a director the right to assume that an audience will see his production more than once? And how often, today, can he assume that his audience is already familiar with the play? In the days of classic repertory this was always assumed, and it can be assumed today in connection with a very few of the best-known Shakespearean plays; but generally the director must reckon with the fact that the great majority of his audience have never seen the play before and will probably not see it again.

That this is unfortunate, all real lovers of the theatre will agree. It not only discourages the revival of the world's finest older plays, but makes hard sledding for pioneers and experimenters seeking new forms of theatrical expression. William Saroyan's *Jim Dandy* is in many ways the most interesting and satisfying play I have ever worked with; but one simply has to see it three or four times to get its full effect. The most a director can hope to do with it is to make an audience want to see it again.<sup>2</sup> It is never possible to predict the reactions of an audience with absolute certainty, and it is never possible to please everybody. In the midst of a highly appreciative audience at a performance of *What Every Woman Knows*, with Helen Hayes in the leading part, one man and woman sat with an air of sad resignation. At the conclusion they put on their coats in silence, and then the man said to the woman: "Yah, dey always has a gyp show at dis t'eyater!" Such is the reward of excellence.

#### NOTES ON POLISHING

So many elements need attention in the polishing of a play that anything like a complete discussion of them all is out of the question. A few

<sup>2</sup> See Dolman, "*Jim Dandy*, Pioneer," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, February, 1944.

practical hints in condensed form may, however, be useful, and I offer them as a sort of appendix to this chapter:

1. Study your prompt book between rehearsals, noting the points that have been missed or neglected; many of these can be written down and handed to the actors before the next rehearsal, at a great saving of rehearsal time.

2. Direct the polishing rehearsals from the auditorium, not from the stage. Move farther and farther back. Try the visibility and audibility from all parts of the house, including the balcony and gallery.

3. Check up on the settings, exits and entrances, sources of light, and arrangements of furniture, as seen from all angles.

4. Test out the stage pictures from all angles. Squint at them.

5. Remember what has been said about the time element in stage pictures. (See page 116.) Polish the transitions.

6. Remember the principle of grace—that is, economy of effort. Try to eliminate unnecessary effort, or the suggestion thereof. Check grace of plan from the balcony or gallery.

7. Watch for detrimental empathies of any sort, and eliminate them. (See page 25.) Rehearse carefully all scenes in which actors carry heavy weights. Teach the actors who are carried to relax. Watch all moving of furniture, and all such actions as sitting, kneeling, or rising, to see that there is no unnecessary suggestion of effort.

8. Bearing in mind the charge that directions learned in advance inhibit the actor, check up to see whether any movements seem stiff or mechanical. If so, find out why. If necessary, allow the actor a little more freedom, or change the movements for him. As a rule he will need the change rather than the freedom.

9. Seek out and remove all distractions. Watch especially the actors who are not speaking. Eliminate fidgeting. When there is too much movement or business, select and reject, but retain that which is relevant rather than that which is clever. Check up constantly on the principle: "No movement without a purpose." Challenge any new movement or business introduced by the actors, and accept it only when the purpose is sound.

10. Aim constantly to simplify. Work for strength rather than elaboration.

11. Watch for violations of unity, both in the play as a whole and in

each act and scene. Watch especially for diffusion of interest, a very common fault in amateur production. Keep the balance between unity and variety.

12. When the play seems "talky," introduce one or two significant bits of action at critical points rather than many unimportant ones. Consider whether some of the talk can be cut.

13. Check up again and again to see that the most essential and significant lines are reaching the audience.

14. At the same time suppress any overemphasis, and any misplaced accent growing out of attempted emphasis.

15. See that the play as a whole is coming over the footlights; that the actors face the audience often enough and play far enough down stage, and speak with sufficient volume.

16. See that the actors are creating the "illusion of the first time."

17. Combat the tendency of some actors to shorten their movements, failing to use the full stage space. Make the performance fill the eye. But guard against restlessness; work for bold broad movements, but not too many of them.

18. Study carefully the matter of æsthetic distance. Consider it from all parts of the house. Suppress any tendency on the part of the actors to establish communication with the audience, or to step out of the picture. Check excessive realism, especially unpleasant realism. (See Chapter III.)

19. Watch the acting at the points of strongest emotion. Guard against false or exaggerated emotion, and against painful empathies. But remember that the emotional phase is the hardest to judge correctly before the actual performance. When the emotional acting is false or unconvincing consider the possibility of simplification, especially by substitution of significant business. (See pages 19 and 79.)

20. Remember the "James-Lange theory." (See page 103.)

21. Suppress any tendency of the actors to show consciousness of the "fourth wall."

22. Consider the tone and mood of the acting at all times.

23. In a comedy, no matter how serious, see that an optimistic tone prevails—not necessarily a happy tone all of the time, but a tone that foreshadows the ultimate triumph of the protagonist.

24. In a tragedy see that a sense of inevitability is planted and main-

tained, and that there is a crescendo effect as the tragic forces gather. Guard against any interruption or letdown that may break the climactic force.

25. Beware of what Stark Young calls "the tragic goose step," especially in poetic and heroic plays. Do not let the actor strut or pose.

26. Nurse the rhythms—at least as far as they express the moods correctly—and make the most of them.

27. Try to have the actors avoid the commonplace and give a touch of distinction to their parts.

28. Check the tempo constantly. Guard against the tendency of the actors to slip out of tempo, especially the tendency of each actor to take the tempo of his line from that of the actor who speaks before him.

29. Teach the actors to "hold the picture" and stay in character when interrupted by laughter or applause; also when taking receptions and curtain calls.

30. If curtain calls are ruled out as a matter of policy, see that everybody is so informed, and that a statement to that effect is printed in the program.

31. If curtain calls are to be allowed, decide what actors or groups are to take them, and in what succession. Rehearse the curtain calls as carefully as the acts. Insist, however, upon modesty and reserve, and see that the actors remain in character. It is always painful to see a group of amateurs take curtain calls in a stagy, ostentatious manner, with elaborate bows and smirks; but it is almost equally painful to see them caught unawares by the raising of the curtain, and to see them running every which way and bumping into each other like a lot of frightened sheep.

32. Finally, study the audience at the first performance; note the responses, especially the unexpected ones, and prepare immediately to make any necessary changes or readjustments.

In other words, be omniscient and omnipotent; let nothing escape you, and perfect every detail. Outside of that there is very little to do.



## *Theories of Acting*

IN ANY study of the art of acting it quickly becomes apparent that there is no one true theory, no one best method. Different plays and different conditions call for different styles of acting, and different actors develop their talents in different ways. For all this variety we should be thankful; it is part of the charm of the theatre.

The taste of the public changes in a general way from generation to generation, and what was thought the very finest acting in Shakespeare's time, or Garrick's, or Forrest's, or Booth's, or Irving's, may not be so considered today. It is doubtful whether a modern audience would enjoy the direct declamation of an Elizabethan actor or the roaring passion of a Forrest; we prefer a more consistent illusion and a greater measure of restraint. We are learning, also, to think less of virtuosity for its own sake, and more of artistic unity and sincerity. A few years ago we welcomed a company of Russian actors playing in the Russian language, and admired them for their self-suppression in the interest of teamwork; but I doubt whether any modern audience would care to hear a French or Italian actor playing in his native language with a supporting company playing in English—a kind of exhibition in which our theatre-wise ancestors delighted. In spite of our star system, our personality actors, and our movie heroes and heroines, we are coming more and more to feel that it is the play as a whole which matters, and that the satisfactory actor is the one who fits in rather than the one who stands out.

### EMOTION IN ACTING

But while times are changing and variations of technique multiplying, certain fundamental questions of principle in acting remain always with us, and persist in getting themselves discussed, even to the point of controversy. Most irrepressible of such questions is the one raised in 1770 by Diderot, the French philosopher and critic, in his famous *Paradoxe*

*sur le comédien*—that is to say, the question of how much real emotion an actor should feel in playing his part.

In contending that the actor should be completely insensible to emotion Diderot so far overstated his case that he cannot be taken quite seriously. His theory is remembered today chiefly because the great French actor Constant Coquelin revived and defended it in a widely read essay, *L'Art et le comédien*, published in 1880-81. Without quoting Diderot, Coquelin endorsed the *Paradoxe* as "literal truth," but a study of his whole essay reveals a general attitude so much more temperate than Diderot's that one is inclined to wonder whether he had read the *Paradoxe* before endorsing it. "Extreme sensibility," says Diderot, "makes middling actors; middling sensibility makes the ruck of bad actors; in complete absence of sensibility is the possibility of a sublime actor." What Coquelin says, in effect, is that acting is an art with certain natural limitations and conventions to distinguish it from reality; and that for effective creative work in that art the actor must "remain master of himself throughout the most impassioned and violent action on the part of the character which he represents; in a word, remain unmoved himself, the more surely to move others. . . ." He does not say, as Diderot does, that the actor should be insensible to emotion—merely that he should neither give way to it, nor depend upon it. "I am convinced," he says, "that one can only be a great actor on condition of a complete self-mastery and ability to express feelings which are not experienced, which may never be experienced, which from the very nature of things never can be experienced."

Coquelin's essay aroused a great deal of protest, and led to a spirited controversy in which the English actor Henry Irving became the leader of the opposition. The controversy interested William Archer, who, with the cooperation of *Longman's Magazine*, undertook to assemble and analyze all the available opinions on both sides. He distributed an elaborate questionnaire, asking several hundred actors and actresses whether they were in the habit of giving way to genuine tears, blushes, or laughter on the stage; whether their acting of emotional scenes was affected by their memory of personal sorrows or other experiences; whether they found it necessary to prepare for exacting parts by working up their emotions beforehand; whether they experienced a kind of "double consciousness" in acting; and whether they believed in making use of sudden inspirations.

The results of his study were published first in the magazine and later (1888) in the form of a book entitled *Masks or Faces*.

I shall not attempt to detail all of Mr. Archer's conclusions; every actor and every stage director should read *Masks or Faces* for himself. It is sufficient to say that although he is by no means unbiased in his attitude and starts out with the evident purpose to prove Diderot in the wrong, he ends by accepting a compromise position. He brings overwhelming evidence against the notion that a temperamentally insensitive person makes the best actor, but he finally agrees that a measure of self-control is essential to good acting, even in highly emotional scenes. This, after all, was Coquelin's main point, if not Diderot's, and it is admitted by Irving, Booth, Barrett, Clara Morris, and many other players quoted by Mr. Archer as supporters of the emotional theory. Clara Morris—who shed tears profusely on the stage and “felt” her parts with exquisite agony—states the compromise view clearly. “As to really losing oneself in a part,” she said, “that will not do; it is worse to be too sympathetic than to have too much art. I must cry in my emotional roles and feel enough to cry, but I must not allow myself to become so affected as to mumble my words, to redden my nose, or to become hysterical.” Lambert's famous phrase, *Le cœur chaud, la tête froide* (“a warm heart but a cool head”) expresses the same idea in epigrammatic form, and offers perhaps the best statement of the true paradox of acting.

#### EMOTION AND TEAMWORK

From the standpoint of the modern director, William Archer's book has, I think, one or two limitations for which the student must make due allowance. The most serious is that he appears to consider acting as an individual matter, ignoring the problem of teamwork. When an actor under stress of emotion produces an effect which not only electrifies his audience but startles his fellow actors out of their composure, one may properly ask if he is not achieving a personal triumph at the expense of the teamwork. Mr. Archer cites incidents of the kind with implied praise, and in accordance with the prevailing taste in 1888 he appears to measure excellence in acting largely by intensity of emotional effect upon the audience. The good actor, to him, is the one who stops the show. He admits that a complete loss of self-control is bad, but he appears to think of it in terms of the individual actor and the effect upon his acting. The

modern director must think in terms of the whole play, and to him the great danger in excessively emotional acting is that it will throw the actor out of his stride, disrupt the teamwork, disconcert the other actors, and unbalance the production.

A second limitation in Mr. Archer's discussion is the fact that he conducts it without definition of terms, and without knowledge of the psychological principles involved—or at any rate without reference to them. Had he believed, as most psychologists now believe, that emotion is the effect rather than the cause of bodily activity, he would doubtless have attacked the problem in a different way. Diderot's conception of a great actor simulating perfectly the bodily manifestations of emotion and yet feeling no emotion himself is clearly improbable under the James-Lange theory.<sup>1</sup> But equally improbable is Mr. Archer's conception of emotion as an inner urge, an actuating cause, moving the actor to outward expression.

Emotion, according to the James-Lange theory, is but the realization in consciousness of certain bodily activities—laughter, tears, trembling, dryness of the throat, and so on—the activities themselves being induced by sensory stimuli. The emotion aroused by one set of motor activities may, of course, play a part in shaping the next set, since the motor activities are governed by past experience as well as by immediate stimuli; but that means a procession of horse-drawn carts rather than a cart before its own horse. Every emotion felt by the actor will undoubtedly affect his *subsequent* motor activities; but it cannot affect the motor activities out of which that particular emotion is built, since they precede it. From the fact that many great actors weep and suffer in sympathy with the characters they portray, William Archer seems to infer that they are great actors because they are able to weep and suffer. William James would doubtless have said that they weep and suffer because they are great actors—because they simulate the bodily activities of suffering so completely that they cannot help feeling the corresponding emotion.

#### EMOTION AND IMAGINATION

If the James-Lange theory is correct, emotion on the stage is not in itself a thing to be especially cultivated—or avoided. The thing to be cultivated is imagination.

<sup>1</sup> See page 103.



Imagination is the power to conjure up unrealities in terms of reality; to see in the mind's eye, or hear in the mind's ear; to draw present sensations out of past experiences, and to assemble them in new combinations. In the actor it is the power to conceive in his own body the significant motor activities of a fictitious character. So far as emotional experience, on or off the stage, helps him to cultivate his imagination it is good; and so far as a lack of sensibility hampers the development of his imagination it is bad. "In my opinion," said Lawrence Barrett, "the prime requisites of an actor are sensibility and imagination. But he must have these under perfect control. The moment that they become his masters instead of his servants he ceases to be an artist." What is called sensibility includes, I take it, a general responsiveness to sense impressions, and also a keenly active sympathetic system by which the experiences of one part of the body are felt associatively in other parts. Mr. Archer seems to use the terms emotion and sensibility almost interchangeably, but sensibility is, I think, a very different thing from emotion. Emotion is sensitivity to one's own bodily state; sensibility is sensitivity to one's environment. Emotion does not always breed imagination; emotional people are often self-centered, narrow, or unsympathetic. But sensibility, in the broadest sense, enriches the imagination by enriching the experience.

Actors are notoriously poor analysts, and most of what they have written about acting is not very intelligible or very trustworthy, but if there is any one point upon which they have generally agreed it is the importance of imagination. It was surely imagination—not emotion—that Garrick was thinking of when he made his much-quoted remark to a young actor who had complained of inadequate inspiration in his surroundings: "If you cannot give a speech, or make love, to a table, chair or marble as well as to the finest woman in the world, you are not, nor ever will be, a great actor!"<sup>2</sup> The timeworn story of Madame Modjeska reducing an audience to tears by reciting the Polish multiplication table is more likely to be quoted in illustration of the power of imagination than in defense of real emotion in acting—as is the similar story of three actors in a restaurant, one of whom made the others weep by reading the menu aloud. Of the latter story Alexander Woolcott disposed by offering the opinion that the three actors "were all soused to the gills"; and perhaps all stories of this type should be taken with a grain of salt. But if there is any-

<sup>2</sup> It is said, by the way, that Diderot based his *Paradoxe* partly on his observation of Garrick.

thing in them at all, they illustrate imagination rather than emotion on the part of the actor.

A great many actors, past and present, have felt the necessity of spending some time before each performance in seclusion in order to get into adjustment with their characters. It is said that Salvini always dressed and made up an hour or two early and gave himself over to meditation, while other actors smoked or chatted. Clara Morris found him one evening pacing up and down on the dark stage. "You walk far, signor," she said. "Si, signorina," was the reply, "I walk me into him!" Stanislavsky used to do the same thing. He called it "getting into the circle," and in the Moscow Art Theatre each actor is supposed to think of nothing but his character before and during the performance, and no irrelevant conversation or diversion is encouraged back stage. This sort of thing is often cited to prove the importance of emotion or sensibility in acting, but it really has little to do with either. It is a matter of imagination. Some actors need more help than others in order to set their imaginations going, and some are more easily distracted than others by irrelevant things. Talma, reputedly one of the strongly emotional actors, could laugh and chat in the wings, but at the sound of his cue jump instantly into the most impassioned scenes. Whether a young actor should follow Salvini's method or Talma's is a question of temperament, affected somewhat by the character of the part, and by its familiarity to the actor.

#### THE ÆSTHETIC BALANCE

A great deal of confusion on the subject of acting seems to me to disappear when we do our theorizing in terms of empathy and æsthetic distance. At the risk of repeating what was said in an earlier chapter let me try to restate the problem of "masks or faces" in those terms.

The actor's purpose is to create something not so much on the stage as in the imaginations of his hearers. He is there to give them æsthetic pleasure, and to do so he must give them something in which they can empathize—something into which they can feel themselves imitatively—but toward which at the same time they can maintain an attitude of personal detachment. The more realistically he portrays the bodily activities of the character he represents, the more completely will the audience feel those activities imitatively in themselves, and when the activities happen to be those which give rise to emotion, the more keenly will the audience

(and incidentally the actor) feel the emotion. It is a part of our pleasure in the theatre, as in all fiction, to share empathically the emotions of the characters, but only when the balance of emotions in the play or book as a whole is satisfying, and only when we are able to maintain our æsthetic distance. If the actor portrays unpleasant scenes too vividly there are too many unpleasant emotions aroused in us, and the experience becomes too harrowing; and if his portrayal reminds us too painfully of ourselves and our real troubles we lose our æsthetic distance. It should be obvious that if the actor throws himself into a part with so much realism as to break down emotionally he has destroyed his own æsthetic distance; and if he has done that there is a fair probability that he has done the same thing empathically for his audience.

It must be remembered, too, that art is not life, and that even in the most realistic drama there is a convention of unreality, felt by the audience, consciously or unconsciously. When an actor is so far carried away by his part as to show real emotion there is danger that the audience will detect that fact; and the moment they discover that it is the actor rather than the character who is laughing or weeping, the illusion vanishes and again æsthetic distance breaks down. It is quite true that some actors can experience more real emotion than others without detection, and that some audiences are less able to distinguish between real and acted emotion; but the difference is merely relative and the principle holds good.

There is, of course, no rule of proportion for preserving the balance between empathy and æsthetic distance. Neither element is measurable. But there are certain variable factors which affect the proportion in ways that can be understood.

In general it may be said that a play dealing with exotic or unfamiliar places and characters will bear stronger empathies than a play dealing with everyday life. The greater the resemblance to familiar reality the greater the danger to æsthetic distance. Many people did not like George Kelly's *The Show-Off*, for instance, because they could not maintain the necessary detachment; it was too much like real life. One student of mine wrote: "We have a man just like that in our own family, and I do not care to be reminded of him any oftener than is necessary." Others disliked *Street Scene* and *Dead End* for similar reasons, finding them more painful than beautiful.

Similarly, a play that is fancifully or idealistically treated will bear more

empathy than one realistically treated. The material may be familiar enough, but if the spirit is one of idealization, that in itself helps to preserve æsthetic distance. All other things being equal, a costume play is less likely to break down under excessive realism than a play in modern dress; a play in verse is less likely than a play in prose; a play in the heroic mood is less likely than one in a plaintive or pessimistic mood. A little study of such contrasts will reveal a great deal about the balance of empathy and æsthetic distance. It will also reveal why the great poetic tragedies have more universality and permanence than the drab, depressing dramas of the realistic school, and why the great actors of the last century could go so much farther in the display of passion than most actors dare go today.

Physical conditions, too, may affect the æsthetic balance. Empathic responses are harder to get in a large theatre than a small one, but æsthetic distance is easier to maintain. Make-up, to the extent that it disguises the actor, helps to maintain æsthetic distance; but when it becomes painfully obvious it weakens empathic appeal. A platform stage, being less realistic than a proscenium stage, is less likely to destroy æsthetic distance through excessive illusion of reality; on the other hand it may destroy it through *weakness* of illusion or through establishment of direct communication between actor and audience. At its best the platform stage permits of the strongest possible empathic appeal, but its technique is much more difficult than that of the "picture frame" stage, and the æsthetic balance more precarious. The same is true of the "arena" or "penthouse" stage. On any type of stage the lighting effects play a very important part in maintaining the æsthetic attitude. But the management of the physical conditions is not our concern here; the point is that the actor must regulate the degree and nature of his empathic appeal in accordance with the conditions.

#### REALISM IN ACTING

The prevailing taste of the movie-trained public today is for a good deal of realism in acting; but the considered opinion of many modern critics and playwrights, from Gordon Craig and Kenneth Macgowan to William Saroyan and Thornton Wilder, is that realism is all wrong. It should be the actor's business, they say, to create, not to imitate. They object to the whole conception of art as imitation or representation, and insist upon presentation, or expression, or abstraction, as the proper aim.

In accordance with this view they condemn every attempt to counterfeit nature or create illusion.

There can be no doubt that representative or imitative realism has often been carried to excess in the modern theatre; but before condemning the *principle* of realism let us try to define our terms, and to discover if possible the motives involved.

If by realism we mean one hundred per cent reproduction of reality, then of course realism is not art. But I cannot find that anybody does mean this, except perhaps in relation to the motion pictures; and the Hollywood magnates insist that they are conducting an industry, not an art. The most ardent realists in all branches of art agree that art is not reality—that some principle of limitation, or selection, or emphasis, or interpretation, or conventionalization must enter into the work of the artist in order to distinguish it from the work of the scientist or reporter. Virtually all artists claim that their purpose is to suggest, rather than to portray; or at any rate to suggest more than they portray—even the ones who portray a great deal. All artists aim to stimulate imagination. The difference is that some try to do so by abstract symbolism, others by concrete representation.

In order to stimulate imagination through suggestion it is necessary to represent (that is re-present) certain elements of real experience. Suggestion is not possible in any other way. We think, feel, and imagine in terms of past experience and we cannot do these things at all unless some germs of past experience are presented to our senses to stir up our mental and emotional associations. If the elements presented are singly and collectively quite unfamiliar, they have no meaning for us, arouse no associations, and leave us baffled.

Realism, then, is not absolute, but relative. The question for the artist is what proportion of reality, what degree of concrete representation, is necessary to accomplish the desired suggestion. In the comparatively abstract art of music the sound of a thunder-sheet may be thought unnecessarily realistic; but in a play the sound of the same thunder-sheet back stage may be laughed at as too unconvincing to carry the illusion. Acting is by nature one of the most realistic of the arts, because it is in terms of human beings, the realest things we know. The most abstract or stylized acting, even the pantomime of the ballet, is in that sense more representatively realistic than the most obvious of "program" music. Let us

understand, therefore, that realism as a principle is neither good nor bad; that what is to be condemned is its excessive application. But let us also understand that the very inevitability of realism in acting is in itself a temptation to excess.

The consistent realism of detail which we sometimes find in the modern theatre is, of course, relatively new in history. It is variously said to have begun with Betterton, or Macklin, or Garrick, or Booth, or Appia, or Irving, or Belasco. But to suppose that realism as a principle began with any of these is to misunderstand the problem completely. There were elements of realism in the Greek theatre, including stage properties, some painted scenes, mechanical effects, and attempts—especially on the part of Euripides—to humanize the drama itself. I have no doubt there were moments of realism in the acting, despite the masks and choruses and poetic conventions; certainly there were such moments in Roman acting at a time when the ambition of the Romans was to imitate the Greeks. There were moments of realism in medieval times and in the age of Elizabeth. There was more attempt at realism of effect in Shakespeare's time than is generally supposed, even in the public theatres; and in the private theatres there was more than in some of the little theatres of today. There was, of course, no such completeness and consistency of illusion as we find in the modern theatre, in either setting or acting. The realistic stage effects were sporadic and inconsistent, and obviously intended to suggest illusion rather than to maintain it by complete and continued deception. The actors declaimed most of their lines in conventional manner, dropped out of character between times, and were often interrupted—at least in the public theatres—by disorderly members of the audience. But we may well believe that their conception of the highest achievement in acting was "to hold the mirror up to nature," and that their moments of greatest triumph were the moments of greatest realism in the portrayal of thought and feeling. If this was true in the comparatively idealistic plays of Shakespeare it must have been even more so in the plays of Marlowe and Webster and in the so-called "domestic murder plays," which for stark realism of situation can hardly be matched in modern drama.

The same impulse to realism of portrayal on the part of the individual actor persisted through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was that impulse which made Garrick clutch at the imaginary dagger in *Macbeth*, which made Macready and Clara Morris study the inmates of

asylums the better to portray insanity, and which made Edmund Kean chew red madder during his death scenes in order to drool blood. But realism of this kind is less common today than it was in the days of heroic declamatory acting, and when it appears it is usually less intense. Most good actors now have some feeling for æsthetic distance, whether or not they know it by name, and they are aware that excessive realism destroys the proper attitude of the audience. Clara Morris found this out for herself, and in her *Stage Confidences* she cites many instances in which scenes on the stage came too close to real life. In one play she portrayed incipient madness by clasping her arms about her knees and swaying, as she had seen a woman inmate of an asylum do; but at the first performance a young girl in the audience fainted and had to be carried out. She had recognized her mother's symptoms. A hundred years earlier Sarah Siddons's exploit in making people faint had been hailed as a triumph of acting; but Clara Morris had the good sense to see that such effects were not those of legitimate art, and she took pains to avoid them in her later years. Nearly all the great actors of the last two or three generations have recorded similar experiences and similar conclusions.

But if the impulse to excessive realism in acting is on the decline, what is it that gives rise to the charge that the theatre is being ruined by realism? What is it that began with Betterton and Garrick and Macklin, that has been growing upon us ever since, and that has made the modern theatre and modern acting so different from the Elizabethan?

#### CONSISTENCY AND COMPLETENESS

First of all it is the idea of consistency—not realism but *consistency* in realism. It was the idea of consistency, as a reaction against *inconsistency*, that caused Betterton to stay in character between lines and to strive for a more continuous illusion. It was the idea of consistency that caused Macklin to play Macbeth in Scottish costume instead of the usual English general's uniform. It was the idea of consistency that led Garrick to drive the audience off the stage, and to demand of his actors a greater degree of artistic unity and imaginative sincerity than the English stage had known before. And it is the idea of consistency—growing with sophistication and constantly subjected to fresh challenge through improvement of material equipment—that has engendered in the modern theatre an increasing regard for scenic realism, for natural lighting, for smooth me-

chanical effects, for teamwork and restraint in acting, for perfection of detail in every department of play production.

Consistency, like everything else, can be carried to excess; but so far as it represents the natural revolt against stupid inconsistency it can be defended. The more civilized we become, the more sensitive we grow to inconsistency and the more certainly it becomes for us a source of distraction. We may regret this, and long for the more rugged, naïve imaginations of our ancestors; but they can be brought back only through a reversal of the process of civilization. In the present order of things we must expect to demand more and more consistency.

But does this mean that art must become more and more representatively realistic, more and more photographic in detail? It most certainly does not.

The trouble is that we have got two ideas rather badly mixed—the idea of consistency and the idea of completeness. Inconsistency and incompleteness often go hand in hand, and they did so in the early days of the theatre. So when actors and producers began to feel the need of more consistency they quite naturally failed to distinguish between consistency and completeness, and in working for the one they worked also for the other. Sometimes completeness has seemed the only apparent means to consistency—as when the improvement in stage lighting disclosed the incompleteness and inconsistency of old-style scenery; or when the increasing interest in contemporary domestic drama necessitated a little more attention to make-up, dialect, and stage business. And now the process has gone so far that some of our realists are simply floundering; they are straining for representative completeness when they should be aiming at consistency of illusion. A degree of consistency appropriate to our civilization is essential to art and to the illusion of art. But art is selective, and representative completeness is therefore undesirable—besides which it is impossible, at least in the theatre.

Good acting is neither wholly realistic nor wholly unrealistic. It is sufficiently realistic to be intelligible and suggestive and to arouse the necessary empathy; it is sufficiently consistent to be convincing; and it is sufficiently unreal to preserve æsthetic distance and to leave something to the imagination. Within these limitations of principle it is capable of great variation in style, from the painstaking yet spiritual realism of the Moscow Art Theatre to the pure make-believe of the Chinese.



## FREEDOM VERSUS REPRESSION IN ACTING

The question of style in acting is almost as troublesome as that of principle. Some theatre-goers, for instance, will always prefer the actor who plays with freedom or abandon, who seems to "wear his heart on his sleeve," and to put all his powers of expression into his part. Others will prefer the actor who plays more quietly and seems to hold something back.

The extreme abandon of the romantic age, with its "grand manner," its furious display of passion, its orotund declamation, its bursts of harrowing realism and its consequent destruction of æsthetic distance, is gone, let us hope, forever. But there are still many people who feel that the repressed style of acting so common today, especially among English actors, has taken some of the life out of the theatre. Such acting, they say, is cold, conventional, unexciting. It fails to stir the soul.

If this charge is true, repression in acting is bad. The only real test, of course, is the effect upon the audience; and that is bound to be conditioned by the temper and custom of the time. But no actor *aims* to be cold, conventional, and unexciting; if his acting lacks freedom it is either because he is unimaginative or self-conscious, or because he believes in restraint as a more effective method of suggestion than complete absence of restraint. If he is unimaginative or self-conscious his acting is merely bad acting and need not be discussed; but if his restraint is intentional we must consider whether he is right in believing that restraint is—or ought to be—effective.

It has been suggested that comedy and tragedy call for different styles of acting, and that the English type of restraint is suitable only for comedy. Stark Young<sup>3</sup> thinks that the English actor, starting with a handicap of racial inexpressiveness, is not capable of acting tragedy effectively; though not everybody will subscribe to the implication that Betterton, Garrick, Mrs. Siddons, Kean, Macready, Irving, and Ellen Terry were mute and inglorious tragedians compared with Rachel, Bernhardt, Duse, and Salvini. Lester Wallack<sup>4</sup> thought that comedy was naturally self-conscious and technical; tragedy, spontaneous and abandoned. There is clearly some truth in this point of view. But the terms are relative, and all we can safely say is that comedy will bear a little more conscious restraint than

<sup>3</sup> *Theatre Practice*, p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> *Memories of Fifty Years*, p. 172.

tragedy. Neither should be obtrusively self-conscious, and neither should be abandoned to the point of hysteria.

A certain increase of restraint in acting is a natural and inevitable accompaniment of our increasing sensitivity to æsthetic distance. Sometimes, too, repression is more poignantly suggestive of deep emotion than the wildest sort of rant. It is a commonplace of real life that those who conceal their grief suffer more deeply than those who give way to it; true or false, the idea is so widely accepted that it is bound to shape our empathies. When an actor succeeds in giving us the impression of emotion bottled up, our empathic response is very strong, and the more civilized we are the stronger it is. Civilization trains us to repress and conceal our emotions; so when a character in whom we are empathizing gives way to his emotions we feel it in ourselves as a weakness. There are times, to be sure, when a vicarious release from our inhibitions is just what we most desire; but we do not like to feel, for any considerable time, that we are losing our grip. If we weep too freely or laugh too loudly we are a little ashamed of ourselves afterwards; but we are never ashamed of having *felt* deeply, with outward restraint.

Sarah Bernhardt, who could rant well enough on occasion, was never more effective than when she conveyed a whole tumult of feeling with a single significant gesture. In *La Tosca*, for example, when her lover was understood to be undergoing torture in the next room, she did not beat upon the door with both fists and shake her hair loose, as any good movie queen would do. She stood close to the door with her arm against it and her forehead against her arm, and the only movement was a convulsive twitching and clenching of the free hand. Repression of this kind is not uncommon with great actors in emotional scenes. With the French it is a matter of studied technique, a part of their classicism; with the Russians of the Moscow Art Theatre, and with many Americans, it is a phase of realism; but with the English it is a definite convention, partly ethical and partly æsthetic, comparable to the toning down of a too garish painting. Much of the complaint against it comes from those whose taste is for more lurid coloring.

Repression at its best really *is* convention—the convention of selection—in short, of art. It is the unessential that is repressed; the essential somehow gets through. A painter selects a few harmonious colors to convey the mood of his picture, and suppresses the rest. An illustrator draws a

few telling lines and a graphic story appears on the page. An actor seizes upon a significant gesture, represses all meaningless movement, and a wave of emotion sweeps over the audience. In such repression there is actually a kind of freedom—the freedom of the artist whose judgment is so sure, whose hand is so practiced, that with three or four bold, broad, apparently careless strokes he can paint a whole picture. It is this kind of freedom, not the freedom of indiscrimination, that we really want in art.

#### PERSONALITY VERSUS IMPERSONATION

Another important question is whether the actor should cultivate a personality of his own, recognizable through all his parts, or sink himself so completely in his parts as to be unrecognizable. Nearly everybody professes to admire the perfect actor, who changes himself with each part and disappears in the characterization; yet more people patronize the personality actor than the impersonator. Run over the names of the popular stars who have had large followings in the last generation or two—Maude Adams, Ada Rehan, Julia Marlowe, John Drew, Francis Wilson, Mrs. Fiske, William Gillette, Billie Burke, Frank Bacon, Helen Hayes, George Arliss, Ethel Barrymore, John Barrymore, George Cohan, Frank Craven, Katharine Cornell, Elizabeth Bergner, and so on—and consider which of them can compare with Erskine Sanford or Henry Travers as character impersonators. Erskine Sanford's Mr. Pim, in the original Theatre Guild production, will be remembered for a long time by all who saw it; but very few of them realized that the absent-minded old gentleman was being portrayed by a comparatively young actor, and very few recognized him later as the utterly different persons he played in *St. Joan*, *Johannes Kreisler*, and *Mourning Becomes Electra*. Henry Travers' Stogumber was almost the high spot of Shaw's *St. Joan*, but who recognized the same actor as Androcles in the Theatre Guild production of *Androcles and the Lion*, or as Grandpa Vanderhof in *You Can't Take It With You*? Both of these actors disappear so completely in their parts that they hide themselves from their audiences to their own professional disadvantage; and there are many others like them. Even on the screen the ablest and most versatile character actors are seldom featured as stars or remembered by the audience; while Bing Crosby, Greer Garson, Katharine Hepburn, Gary Cooper, Jennifer Jones, and a score of other screen

personalities are sure of a box-office following—at least until they are replaced by newer favorites.

Advertising, of course, plays an important part—indirect advertising especially. The very fact that a personality actor is recognizable in several parts fixes his identity in the minds of the producers as well as the audience, and both begin to advertise him. People talk about the actor whose name and face they can remember; and they remember the one who is advertised, or who advertises himself by consistent tags or mannerisms. Producers in turn advertise the actor they find the audiences talking about; and a kind of vicious circle is established. In the cleverest impersonation there is an element of impermanence which disconcerts memory and discourages investment; and nobody can be blamed for clinging to the more comprehensible and more profitable element of personality.

In each of us, too, there is a streak of conservatism. We distrust the thing we do not know about, and hold fast to that which is sure. If an actor is good in two or three similar parts we begin to cherish his stage personality as one of our familiar possessions, and we patronize him in preference to some upstart newcomer. Had Erskine Sanford followed Mr. Pim with two or three other characterizations of gentle old men he might have become as popular a stage personality as Mrs. Thomas Whiffen, the darling old lady of the same period.

Of course, a great deal of what we call personality is not personality at all, but merely the accident of getting into a rut—the natural result of type casting. As such it is in no way admirable. The actor who is always the same because he has never tried but one type of part, or because he is simply himself and no actor at all, is not a great artist. But the perfect impersonator is not necessarily a great artist either; he is a skilled artisan. The great artist is more than a clever impersonator; he is an interpreter, and to be a real interpreter he must be a personality as well. To skill in changing his character he must add depth of understanding, individuality, creative imagination, sympathy, awareness, humanity. These are figurative, not scientific, terms; but they represent what, in the best sense, is meant by personality in acting.

#### DUAL PERSONALITY IN ACTING

The chief difficulty in formulating a theory of acting lies in the fact that the actor is *both* impersonator and interpreter at the same time.

When we say that the great actor is a personality, an interpretative, even a creative, artist, we are saying something which is theoretically in conflict with the idea of acting as exhibition or illusion; the distinction between reading and acting in terms of æsthetic distance<sup>5</sup> seems, in that connection, to break down. If the actor is part of the illusion of the play, with the æsthetic distance between him and the audience, how can he serve also as an interpreter? Does not interpretation imply a sharing of experience with the audience, and does not that put him in the place of a reader, on the audience's end of æsthetic distance? The answer is that he must be in both places at once, for he is two persons at once—the artist and the character.

Other artists have instruments and materials outside themselves with which to work, but the actor is his own medium. As the musician plays upon his instrument the actor plays upon himself.

Considered in this way, the dual function of the actor becomes fairly clear, but the difficulty of adjustment and emphasis remains. How can the actor be in character as a part of the exhibition or illusion, and still exercise the function of interpretative artist? How can he, in the words of Stark Young, be "technically able to inject into the movement his own witty comment upon it"?<sup>6</sup> How can he serve as the mouthpiece of the author or as a critic of the play without losing his place in the illusion? How can he take his audience into his confidence without establishing communication with them and so destroying æsthetic distance?

Well, good actors do these things constantly. Few of them, perhaps, can explain how. The most helpful thing that can be said about it is that the actor's two functions are not equally evident to the senses. His function as a character in the play is frank, open, and aboveboard; it is that function which the audience observes—the only one, in fact, which it should be permitted to observe, consciously. It is that function which defines acting with respect to æsthetic distance, and distinguishes it from reading. But the actor's function as an interpretative artist, critic, or leader of the audience should be unseen, subtle, almost telepathic. Since he must use himself as the medium of his art he must keep himself as artist in the background—behind the scenes so to speak. You know he is there but you do not see him. You feel his personality, but you feel it

<sup>5</sup> See Fig. 1, page 31.

<sup>6</sup> *Theatre Practice*, p. 21.

through the character's personality, and you observe no conflict between them.

Two dangers confront the actor who seeks to perform this dual function. The first is that he will overdo the effort at interpretation, injecting too much of his own personality and spoiling the impersonation. The other is that he will fail to distinguish between projection and communication. Direct communication with the audience is indefensible under modern theatrical conditions—at least for legitimate drama. It destroys æsthetic distance, and it destroys the "illusion of the first time." But the actor's appreciative attitude can be projected to the audience without direct communication, and the trick of doing that is the real trick of acting. It is the power of projection which distinguishes the so-called "comedy sense" from the sense of humor. The actor may have a very keen sense of humor, but if he cannot project his appreciation to the audience he has not the comedy sense. And if he cannot project his personality along with his impersonation, or if he has no personality to project, he is not, in the deepest sense, a great actor.



## *Voice and Diction*

NOT much can be done to improve the voice of an actor in the limited time devoted to any one production, but when the director and the group are to be together for several seasons, or even for several productions, some attention to voice and articulation is distinctly worth while.

The importance of voice to the actor can hardly be overstated. The great actors who have written of their art have, almost without exception, emphasized that point. "The voice is the most important of the actor's possessions," said Sarah Bernhardt. "By means of the voice the attention of the public is riveted; the voice it is which binds together actor and auditor. An actor's voice must run the whole gamut of harmonies—grave, plaintive, vibrating, metallic." Bernhardt's own voice was one of the greatest—"liquid music" people used to call it. Edwin Forrest's voice had such power and such depth of vibration that his outbursts of passion almost terrorized his audiences. Of James E. Murdoch, Professor T. C. Trueblood writes, "He had incomparably the finest voice I ever listened to. It was of wide range, powerful, a clear ringing baritone." Salvini's voice was, in the words of Bernhardt, "a whole orchestra." There have been fine voices, too, in our contemporary theatre—not so many great tragic voices, perhaps, as in the last century, but flexible, responsive voices, capable of force and variety in expression.

For every good voice, however, there are many bad ones, and what with the prevalence of type casting and of realistic colloquial plays, the proportion of good voices is diminishing. The fantastic success of some radio comedians whose technique lies mainly in bad grammar and raucous, distorted voices has contributed to the decline.

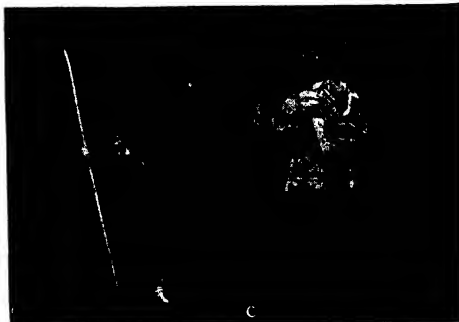
A good vocal equipment includes adequate volume, resistance to fatigue, good tone, good articulation, and flexibility. Practically all of these qualities, and especially the first two, rest upon good breathing.



David Ullman



B



C

Plate 17. Stylization in the Chinese Manner. *The Yellow Jacket*, in a setting suggestive of a Chinese theatre. (a) Final scene. (b) The Second Father-in-Law plots murder. (c) "A cord about his neck!" (d) The hero sets forth in his chariot. (e) The kind mother and her baby boy. Many conventional properties are used, but no scenery in the ordinary sense.

David Ullman



D







*Colburn Ball*



*Plate 13. Tongue-in-the-Cheek Stylization. AT TOP: The School for Husbands at the Cain Park Theatre, Cleveland Heights. AT CENTER: Beggars on Horseback at the New Jersey State Normal School, Trenton. AT BOTTOM: The Comedy of Errors at the Pasadena Playhouse.*

*Eaton*





*John F. Spencer*



*Plate 19. Expressionism in Varied Styles.* Some of the different treatments of *Jim Dandy*, all consistent with Saroyan's description of the scene. TOP: Setting by Barbara D. Spencer for the Players Club of Swarthmore. ABOVE: Lee Norvelle's production at Indiana University; designer, J. A. Smith. LOWER LEFT: Production by C. R. Kase at the University of Delaware; designer, George Samuels. LOWER RIGHT: Gilmor Brown's production at the Pasadena Playhouse.





Jerome H. Fritz

*Plate 20. Decorative Formality with Drapes.* ABOVE: Arrangement for *Lady Precious Stream* at the New Jersey State Teachers' College, Trenton; designer and director, Effie Georgina Kuhn. BELOW, LEFT: Two arrangements for *Twelfth Night*. BELOW, RIGHT: Two for *The Blue Bird*. Both designed by Barbara D. Spencer for the Players Club of Swarthmore.



David Ullman





A. F. Jackson

*Plate 21. Simplicity and Economy in Stylization. A Midsummer Night's Dream, set with beaver-board flats, three permanent platforms, and a black cloth cyclorama. ABOVE: The lovers' quarrel. RIGHT: Rehearsal scene at Quince's Cottage, and a gathering of the fairies at the Duke's Oak. BELOW: Two scenes in the Duke's Palace, with the cyclorama divided to show a sky drop; first entrance of Theseus and Hippolyta, and the beginning of the play within the play.*





*Plate 22. Decorative Simplicity.* ABOVE: *The Circle of Chalk* at Pennsylvania State College; director and designer, James Doll. LEFT: Two black-and-white settings designed by Wesley Wiksell for his production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* at Stephens College, Columbia, Missouri.



*Gordon Conner*

*Plate 23. Projected Light as Part of the Scenery. ABOVE: Setting by Ray Mines for *The Machine Wreckers* at the Cleveland Playhouse; Frederic McConnell, director. BELOW: *The Armored Train* at the Pasadena Playhouse; director, Charles Lane; designer, Janis Muncis.*

*W. A. Martin*





Brooks

*Plate 24. The Formal Outdoor Stage.* Two views of the beautiful garden theatre on the Longwood estate of Mr. and Mrs. Pierre DuPont, as set for productions of operetta by The Brandywiners, of Wilmington, Del. ABOVE: *The Fortune Teller*. BELOW: *The Mikado*. Steps and terrace are permanent; the center vista is very deep. A row of water jets just behind the footlights is used as a curtain, and the entire stage is trapped with electric fountains.

Brooks



## BREATHING

Teachers of voice disagree violently as to what constitutes correct breathing in voice production, and the problem is greatly complicated by confusion of terminology. Not all of those who advocate "abdominal breathing," for example, mean the same thing by it. To avoid both the controversy and the confusion I shall limit my discussion to the presentation, in non-technical terms, of a few fundamentals about which there is little dispute.

The best authorities are generally agreed that correct breathing is natural breathing, in the sense that it is free from physical constraint and conscious self-control, like the breathing of a child. Such breathing involves a maximum of physical action, but a minimum of physical strain. It is perfectly controlled in the sense that it is responsive to the demands of expression, but the control is subconscious, not studied. Most of us do not breathe naturally in this sense; our childhood freedom has been warped and restricted by training and habit, by poor ventilation, cramped posture, and tight clothing; so that very little of our natural bodily freedom is left. Improvement of the breathing habits is, therefore, a matter of trying to restore a natural function.

Good breathing is not confined to the action of a few muscles or to one restricted area; it involves the coordinated activity of a large part of the body. Just which muscles participate, and in what proportion, I shall not attempt to state, since that is one of the matters in dispute. It is fairly safe, however, to assert that the diaphragm plays an important part, and that any method of breathing which gives inadequate play to that muscle is probably wrong. The diaphragm is an internal muscle, and its action is not easily felt, but since the external muscles about the upper abdomen are closely coordinated with it, an active diaphragm brings about a sensation of muscular activity at the center of the body—roughly, at the lower end of the breastbone. Good breathing is neither so high in the chest nor so low in the abdomen as to be grotesque; it is centered in what the pugilist calls the "mid-section." The strain is thus carried by some of the largest and strongest muscles of the body. At the same time, and most important of all, the throat is relaxed. A feeling of strain in a healthy throat during voice production is a sure sign of some fault—usually incorrect breathing.



Numerous exercises for the correction of faulty breathing may be found in the books on public speaking and on voice, and need not be repeated here. One of the best is the so-called "sipping and packing" exercise, by which the air is inhaled in small sips, and packed away until the lungs are full. Another is the "panting" exercise, which is just what the name implies. In general, those exercises which tend to develop the diaphragm and to encourage full open breathing are best; but no exercise should be employed which occasions the slightest strain or irritation in the throat. The actor should be cautioned to take his breathing exercises regularly at special drill periods, and not to think of the breath or its control when actually speaking before an audience.

#### VOCAL QUALITY

Many of the common faults in vocal quality are really faults in breathing, and clear up satisfactorily when the breathing habits are corrected. Others are referable to poor resonance, poor tone placing, or poor selection of pitch; and the worst are referable to poor coordination of mind and voice.

Resonance has much to do with the carrying power of a voice as well as its quality. Poor resonance may result from malformation of the chest, throat, or head, or from a catarrhal or other obstruction; or it may result from faulty coordination of the parts involved. When it is due to malformation or obstruction the case is one for the physician or surgeon. When it is due to faulty coordination it may sometimes be corrected by properly chosen exercises. Chest resonance<sup>1</sup> is usually improved by good breathing exercises tending to increase the lung capacity and the responsiveness of the diaphragm. Head resonance may be improved by relaxing the throat and forwarding the tone so that the upper teeth and the hard palate vibrate; also by practice in singing "*dans la masque*"—that is, humming well forward in the nose with the lips very lightly closed and the whole front of the face tingling with the vibrations. Good resonance at any pitch requires instant adjustment of the soft or movable parts involved, and is greatly impaired by fatigue or irritation; a flat or wooden voice is often simply a tired voice, or a voice that has been strained or abused. The actor should never be allowed to shout or to force his voice in any way, but should be encouraged to seek an easy, open, relaxed ut-

<sup>1</sup> Assuming that there is such a thing. The matter is in controversy.

terance. He should strive to decrease the effort and improve the quality without loss of volume, rather than to increase the volume; if he succeeds in the former, the latter will take care of itself.

Poor resonance is often associated with poor tone placing. If the actor will pronounce in rotation the vowels *oo*, *oh*, *aw*, *ah*, *ă* (the latter sound as in "at"), he will soon notice a sensation that the *oo* is very far back, the *oh* a little less so, the *aw* in the middle of the mouth, the *ah* just behind the teeth, and the *ă* very far forward, almost out of the mouth. This statement refers not to the tongue position as recorded by the phonetician, but to the speaker's own feeling as to where the tone is placed. He will also notice that the mouth is opened wider as the sound comes forward. The resonance is usually poor on the *oo* because the mouth is nearly closed, and any incipient resonance is smothered before it gets out. As the mouth opens and the tone comes forward, the resonance increases and the tone improves until it reaches its best on the *ah*, with the maximum vibration in the mouth, the nasal passages, and the front of the skull. Usually the *ă* is not so good in quality; it is too far forward and the sound escapes into the air without having set up the proper head resonance. Constant practice on these vowels in rotation, with occasional variations of pitch within the natural range of the voice, will help the actor to acquire a sense of the relation between vowel quality, position, and resonance, and to form a concept of the sort of voice he wishes to cultivate.

In the effort to get volume with untrained voices, amateurs often strike too high a pitch. The higher the pitch the greater the volume for a given amount of effort, but the greater the strain on the listener. Most voices are poorer in quality in the upper part of their range than in the lower, and therefore less pleasant to the ear; moreover a high pitch is emotionally associated with fear, desperation, impatience, or frazzled nerves, and is thus empathically disturbing. The actor should be taught to cultivate the lower middle tones of his voice, and to use them ordinarily in preference to the higher. There will still be occasional need for the higher tones to express the states of mind mentioned, and they will be all the more effective by contrast. There will also be need for the very lowest tones to express the deeper emotions. Both extremes of pitch express emotion, but the higher expresses excitement, weakness, and loss of self-control, while the lower expresses depth and sincerity coupled with a measure of restraint. Either may be effective in its place, but the average

pitch level should be a little lower than most amateurs make it. Women especially are apt to pitch their voices too high, or at any rate to offend more by doing so—perhaps because their voices are a full octave higher anyhow. It is noteworthy that the great stage voices have nearly all been rich and flexible in the lower registers.

#### RESPONSIVENESS

The most important quality of voice for the actor is not pure tone, but responsiveness—flexibility accompanied by perfect coordination of the voice with the mind. Nearly all voices are in some degree expressive of character or mood. A rough, hard voice, for instance, may reveal a hard character; or a high-pitched, frantic voice a nervous one. The actor's voice, however, must reveal, not his own chronic disposition, but the varying moods of all the different personalities he portrays. It must be a free and flexible instrument, responsive at all times to his imagination.

The actor should work for both variety and adaptability, and should distinguish between them. Some voices are full of variety yet not adaptable to different parts. The actor playing Hamlet should be able to vary his voice in pitch, force, and tempo to express the many moods of the character, yet it should always be recognizable as the same voice—the voice of Hamlet. The same actor playing Shylock should have a different voice—the voice of Shylock—varying again within its own range, but always consistent with itself. There are many great personality actors who can read their lines with variety of interest, but who cannot, or will not, change their voices for different characters. A partial list, past and present, might include William Gillette, George Arliss, Ethel Barrymore, Mrs. Fiske, Katharine Cornell, Roland Young, and Julie Haydon. Walter Hampden, on the other hand, could always change his voice considerably for different parts; his Shylock was very different from his Hamlet or his Othello. Actresses are generally less able to change their voices than actors, doubtless for purely physical reasons; Helen Hayes has been reasonably successful, but more through variation of dialect and manner than through actual change of timbre. Generally speaking, radio actors are far more skilled in changing vocal quality than are stage actors, especially those who conduct serial programs in which they impersonate many characters, in the manner of the well-known "Amos and Andy." The latter commonly change pitch and rhythm as well as timbre.

A change of timbre, or quality, can be achieved only through a change of resonance. That means that the tone must be differently placed, or that different portions of the chest, throat, and head must be brought into play as resonators. Timbre is dependent upon the number and character of the overtones, and the overtones are determined by the resonance. There is only one way in which an actor can learn to control the timbre, and that is by experiment in variation of resonance followed by abundant practice, preferably under guidance and criticism. The use of a voice-recording instrument is extremely helpful, in this and other problems of voice and characterization.

One of the best possible exercises for the development of vocal responsiveness is the following: Choose a lyric poem embodying some strong emotion—love, grief, pathos, indignation, or mirth. Read it over to get the thought; then read it aloud to an imaginary audience, putting your whole soul into your voice, and a little more. Exaggerate the mood and its expression to the point of “slopping over”; if pathetic, sob over it; if humorous, chuckle over it; if enthusiastic, rave over it. Try to make your voice and body vibrate with the emotion. As soon as you have succeeded in expressing one selection with sufficient exaggeration, drop it and try another in an entirely different mood. Vary the mood four or five ways each time, and try in the course of a week to run the whole gamut of possible emotions. Do not concentrate on any one mood too long, or mannerisms may develop. Remember that it is all mere exercise, and that the exaggeration should not be carried into real life or into the theatre.

Not all actors, of course, need this exercise; some of them “slop over” quite sufficiently without any encouragement. But for the actor whose voice is inhibited and unresponsive it is really very helpful, especially when the inhibition has grown out of shyness or constraint.

Both variety and change of voice may—like everything else in the theatre—be overdone. Too much variety within the part weakens its consistency and gives the impression of straining for effect. Too much change for a new character that does not call for any special vocal quality likewise suggests strain. Straight parts require less adaptation of voice than character parts, and actors playing to a succession of strange audiences on the road have less need to change their voices than those playing in stock or repertory, whose audiences know them too well.

## ENUNCIATION

No production can be effective unless the actors make themselves heard and understood, and in this connection good enunciation is even more important than great volume. The two things, however, are not entirely independent; a certain amount of volume is a necessary part of the enunciation, and insufficient volume often induces mumbling. The latter fault is surprisingly common, even on the professional stage, and some of our best actors and actresses have been roundly scolded for it by the critics. The smaller, more intimate theatres of today have something to do with this; they encourage the actor to speak more quietly, and when he happens to find himself in a larger theatre he cannot shake off the habit. But the chief cause is the tendency of the actors, both amateur and professional, to rehearse in conversational tones, or even undertones. Professionals do this as a matter of tradition; they are supposed to know how to project their voices when "the audience is in," and consider it beneath their dignity to put forth unnecessary effort at rehearsal. Amateurs speak in undertones because they do not know any better, or because they are obliged to rehearse in private houses where full stage volume would annoy the occupants. The director should know that habits formed in rehearsal are hard to break later, and that the only way to be sure of adequate volume in public performance is to have it learned with the lines and thoroughly rehearsed.

There should be enough volume from each player to make him audible, and in addition there should be a reasonable degree of uniformity. It is always distressing to hear one actor shout while another mumbles; the listener cannot adjust his ear to either, and so misses many lines. Directors often fail to detect such variations in rehearsal because they remain too close to the stage; they should listen occasionally from the back row or the balcony; and they should continually insist that the actors place their voices for those regions.

Individual actors should be warned against excessive variation of force in their own delivery. No one, perhaps, was ever more successful in enriching dialogue with variety of force and tempo than the late Mrs. Fiske; but the critics often complained of her poor enunciation. When an actor does not speak loud enough or does not form his consonants distinctly the condemnation is unanimous, but in the case of Mrs. Fiske there was great

difference of opinion; some people had no difficulty in understanding her, while others had a great deal. The reason was that her somewhat jerky outbursts, unexpected pauses, sudden changes of pace and shifts of emphasis were difficult for certain ears to follow, though other ears followed them readily enough. In other words Mrs. Fiske's trouble was not slovenly enunciation, but somewhat excessive variety of enunciation. Very few amateurs, however, need be cautioned against this fault.

An important element in good enunciation, especially when for dramatic reasons the volume must be subdued, is a forward placing of the voice. People marvel at the power of some actors to make themselves heard with no apparent effort and no perceptible raising of the voice. As a rule, these are the actors who speak well forward in the mouth, with the maximum activity of lips, tongue, and teeth. Francis Wilson was the most remarkable example of this that I ever listened to. He spoke in a quiet, confidential, half-nasal tone, but every word was distinctly audible in the last row of the balcony. He seemed to have the power of projecting the sound straight from his lips to the ear of the listener; he kept his chin high, and the words went out into the audience instead of dribbling down his shirt front. A great many of our older actors and actresses still have this power, but it is rare enough among the younger American players.

Another essential of good enunciation is correct vowel quality. Some speakers blur the vowels, failing to distinguish one from another; all their vowels tend to become indeterminates. The several values of *o*, *a*, and *u* are almost reduced to a common *uh*, and the distinction between *e* and short *i* is lost even in accented syllables. Contrasts of vowel sounds are a great aid to clarity of speech, and when a speaker levels his vowels his syllables tend to become indistinguishable. "Uh wunna gutta Phulladulphia" is not the clearest way of saying "I want to go to Philadelphia," but it is about the way some people say it. American speakers are especially careless in this respect, and also in respect to the duration of sounds; they shorten their vowels to such an extent that they frequently seem to be speaking in consonants only. Consonants are noises; vowels are tones; and since much of the beauty and expressiveness of a voice is in the tones, the actor should learn to give full value to his vowels, at least on the accented syllables. He will find that in so doing he also makes easier the enunciation of consonants.

The enunciation of consonants is, of course, the stumbling block for

many actors. There are various reasons for this. One is poor breath control. Another is inadequate or excessive flow of saliva, usually induced by nervousness. Another is failure to sustain the vowel long enough for the muscles to get into position for the next consonant. But the worst and commonest cause is just plain "lip laziness," or, more politely, lip sluggishness, especially sluggishness of the upper lip. Here again the English usually have the better of us. Their habit of speaking forward in the mouth enables them to cultivate responsiveness and flexibility of lips and tongue, without the excessive mobility of countenance that so often accompanies a self-conscious attempt to enunciate distinctly. The actor who is badly troubled with lip sluggishness may profitably exercise his lips and jaws by practicing in rotation such widely divergent sounds as *ee, ah, oo, or ip, it, ik, or el, are, em, or fun, pun, shun*; but he should be warned against making faces and cultivating lack of repose. When the lips have been limbered up to a reasonable degree such exercises should give place to exercises in forwarding the tone.

#### PRONUNCIATION

The problem of correct stage pronunciation is a difficult one, involving both the choice of a standard and the practical task of training the actors to follow it. It has been said that the best English in America is heard on the stage, and there is some truth in the statement, but when it comes to explaining just why and in what respect it is best all sorts of complications arise.

Some plays, of course, do not call for standard English. Realistic plays with strong local color must be played in the dialect of the region depicted, or at least in a fairly suggestive approximation of it; and sometimes several different dialects must be spoken by different characters in the same play. But literary plays or plays of an abstract or universal character, not especially representative of locality or social class, must be played in a sort of English that is at least reasonably free from dialectal limitations and reasonably acceptable to all those who come to hear it.

Standards of pronunciation vary considerably, off the stage as well as on, and for that reason the stage English of New York or London is not always necessary, or even desirable, in an isolated community. The very best Oxford English may, indeed, sound like an affectation to the ears of

a small-town audience in Iowa or Utah, and so distract attention from the play. On the other hand the small-town people do not expect even their local actors to play literary drama in the casual everyday speech and manner of the neighborhood. They expect some slight heightening of effect, some suggestion of universality in the artistic medium employed, including the language. How to get the universality without the affectation is the problem.

Since the American theatre derives historically from the English theatre, and English actors have been playing in this country on and off for nearly two hundred years, it is natural that the traditional standard in stage pronunciation should be slightly more English and less American than the standard of the streets. Up to a certain point this is a good thing, as tending to preserve the unity of English and American dramatic literature; and up to a certain point it is not offensive. A tradition is mellowed in two hundred years, and the pronunciation of our older actors, learned in the school of experience, does not sound affected in the ears of the Iowan or the Californian, or the Philadelphian—much less in those of the Bostonian or New Yorker. What does sound affected is the pseudo-British of the younger actors who have learned their pronunciation by phonetic rule. The standard they follow is, for the most part, very distinctly British; but it is artificially so, lacking both the spontaneity of our native speech and the settled moderation which characterizes the traditional speech of the theatre.

The phoneticians who teach this standard—chiefly in Boston or New York—deny, it is true, any attempt to imitate the speech of England, and point out that every sound which they advocate is to be found native somewhere in the United States. The Italian *a*, for example, in words like “half,” “laugh,” and “master,” is common in some parts of New England and elsewhere. The dropping of final *r* in words like “mother” or “father,” and of medial *r* in words like “hardly” or “courthouse,” is common all over New England and in most parts of the South. But the same New Englander who omits the *r* in “mother,” “father,” and “dear,” supplies it gratuitously in “idea” and “law” (“idear” and “lore”), and the one who says “It is hahf pahst two,” often says “Let’s take the ca-a to Ha-a-vud”—using the so-called short *a* (as in “fat”), prolonged in duration, to which he objects when the Philadelphian uses it in “half” and



"past."<sup>2</sup> The Philadelphian, curiously enough, though he says "la-aff" for "laugh" and "ha-aff" for "half," reverses the New Englander on "cahr" and "Hahrvard." And while the phonetician is trying to persuade the Philadelphian to use an open *o*<sup>3</sup> in words like "not," "got," and "on," the Midwesterner is busy turning "daughter," "water," and "automobile" into "dotter," "wotter," and "ottomobile," and the Vermonter is turning "nought" into "naht."

The heightened conventions of the stage, however, demand a standard of pronunciation somewhat above the carelessness of ordinary speech, and one may well ask what standard, if not the standard of southern England, is to be accepted. The only safe standard, it seems to me, is that of normal English. Normal English is simply the kind of English that is reasonably acceptable wherever English is spoken. It differs from local speech chiefly in the omission of localisms. It is, in fact, a negative thing; its acceptability lies rather in what it leaves out than in what it includes. It leaves out the peculiarities that are familiar in one place but unknown in another, and especially those that are in some regions thought ugly or offensive. It is a kind of common denominator. It includes the elements that are uniform, or nearly so, everywhere; and when it must express what is expressed differently in different regions it does so by compromise, choosing a middle ground.

Some such standard is exemplified in the speech of many actors and actresses who have traveled widely and acted in both England and America, and perhaps elsewhere, and who have been heard often on the radio and in the films. Some of them are English and some American, but it is difficult to tell by their speech which are which.

A similarly cosmopolitan standard is often heard from widely traveled authors, teachers, or statesmen, and from radio speakers who have proved acceptable to both British and American ears. The most completely nor-

<sup>2</sup> In phonetic script the sound is [æ:], as in [kæ:], [hæ:vəd]; it cannot be correctly represented in ordinary English type. Students of stage pronunciation should make themselves familiar with the International Phonetic Script, and its variations, as used in Daniel Jones's *Pronouncing Dictionary* (the London standard) or in Kenyon and Knott's *Pronouncing Dictionary of American English*. They should also study a good text on phonetics, such as the one by Daniel Jones for the British standard, or the one by Kantner and West for the American. They should be warned, however, that when a Boston phonetician speaks of "standard American English" he means the standard of Boston elocution schools; and that when a midwestern phonetician speaks of "General American" English, as distinct from eastern or southern, he really means corn-belt English.

<sup>3</sup> The sound of *aw* as in "awful," but shortened. The phonetic symbol is [ɔ].

mal speech I ever heard was that of King George the Fifth; it did not sound any more extreme to an educated Philadelphian than to an educated Londoner. It is the speech of such persons that the director should have in mind when training a group of amateurs, rather than a preconceived artificial standard.

Two qualities are essential to good speech: intelligibility and freedom from distraction. The trouble with localisms and other peculiarities is that they do distract; they call attention to the actor's limitations when the audience should be thinking of the play. But affectations distract attention quite as much as localisms, and should be avoided for the same reason. Even beauty, in itself a desirable quality, is capable of becoming a source of distraction when overstressed. The problem of stage pronunciation is not primarily a problem of beautification. It is a problem of clarification. A maximum of intelligibility and suitability with a minimum of distraction is the proper goal.

#### NOTES ON PRONUNCIATION

All this is perhaps too general to be of immediate practical assistance to the inexperienced director, who will want to know just what types of pronunciation to encourage and what types to discourage. There is no room here for a pronouncing dictionary, but certain fairly definite suggestions may be offered, as follows:

1. Suppress any marked individual peculiarity of pronunciation, unless useful for character delineation.
2. Suppress or modify any ugly or unpleasant pronunciation not unmistakably the preferred one, or only one, in common usage. But be sure the ugliness is real, and not merely a matter of personal distaste.
3. Discourage any variant pronunciation based primarily on *slovenliness*, such as the substitution of *oo* for long *u* (properly a diphthong *iu*) in words like "stoodent" or "institoot" (although in some words like "blue" and "true" this change is inevitable); the substitution of a cough through the nose for the true dental *t* before *n* in words like "Tren(t)'n" or "impor(t)'nt"; the practical elimination of medial *t* in other words like "men(t)al" or "in(t)eresting"; the substitution of *n* for *ng* in present participles, and in words like "lenth" for "length" or "strenth" for "strength"; the transposition of sounds in words like "calvary" (for "cav-

alry") or "irrevelant" (for "irrelevant"); or the insertion of relief sounds in slightly difficult words like "stastistics" (for "statistics") or "athalete" (for "athlete").

4. Discourage on the other hand any pseudo-learned pronunciation which takes its authority from the *spelling* rather than from the speech of educated persons. This sort of "eye pronunciation" is very common in the present age of literacy without learning, and has been widely fostered in this country by inadequately prepared teachers of English. Common examples include the reinsertion, under influence of the spelling, of sounds long omitted in good usage, like the *t* in "often," "fasten," "hasten," or "waistcoat," the *h* in "forehead," or the *th* in "clothes"; the substitution of a *t* sound for the well-established *ch* sound in words like "picture," "literature," or "fortune"; the unscrambling of *sh* into *s* in "passion" or "issue" ("iss-you" is bad enough, but "iss-oo" is worse); the punctilious separation of syllables in words like "uninteresting" or "extraordinary"; and the painfully artificial sounding of unaccented syllables in words like "lev-el" (for "lev'l") or "cap-tain" (for "capt'n").

5. Discourage any pronunciation so narrowly local as to identify the user with a particular town or community, like the "boid" (for "bird") of the Bowery New Yorkers, or the "sitchyation" (for "situation") of the Pennsylvania Dutch.

6. Of the dialectal peculiarities representing large sections of the country, discourage first those which have generally incurred ridicule in other sections, such as the prolonged diphthongal *ä* of some Middle Atlantic and Middle West regions ("lä-äff," "mā-än," etc.); the somewhat exaggerated Italian *a* of Boston; the drawl of the South, especially when emphasized by diphthongization ("do-ah" for "door," etc.); the hard short *ah* for *aw* of the Middle West ("dotter," "wotter," etc.); the Hoosier twang; the Yankee palatal snarl; and the Bowery slur—which is by no means confined to New York.

7. Discourage any American pronunciation commonly ridiculed in England, such as "jun'lmen" for "gentlemen," "Amurrican" for "American," or "N'York" for "New York." Discourage equally any British pronunciation commonly ridiculed in America—though this is less likely to be a problem in training American actors.

8. Suppress any dialectal peculiarity of recognizably foreign origin, such as the Irish *oi* for long *i*, or *a* for *e* (as in "fate" for "feet"); the

German confusion of *v* and *w*; the French *ee* for short *i* (as in "eet eez" for "it is"); the cockney English or Australian long *i* for long *a* (as in "lye-dy" for "lady"); the Swedish long *a* for long *i* (as in "Ay" for "I"); the Yiddish hard *g* in *ng* combinations; and the common Continental substitution of *t* or *d* for English *th*—very common in Brooklyn and South Philadelphia.

9. Discourage any tendency to break single vowels into diphthongs, as in "hā-ānd" for "hand," "proo-un" for "prune," or "lowered" for "lord."

10. Discourage also the opposite tendency to shorten diphthongs into single vowels, as in "ahr" for "our," or "Om" for "I'm."

11. Encourage any pronunciation which, though not universally employed, is universally admired. In this respect so much depends upon association, intonation, and manner that it would be dangerous to cite specific examples. Some of the less extreme values of *o* and *a* in England and New England, some of the clarities of the Middle West, and some of the softnesses of the South are quite generally pleasing. But a pronunciation is not "universally admired" unless admired by all classes; if widely admired by purists or pedants on the one hand, or by gangsters and rough-necks on the other, but not by ordinary mortals, it should be discouraged.

12. Encourage a moderate or middle sound of *a* in words like "laugh," "class," "after," or "dance"—a sound between the *ă* and the extreme Italian *a*. Such a sound is common in England as well as the United States, and can be learned by most people without affectation, whereas a complete shift from the nasal short *ă* to the Italian *a* usually can not. The phonetician may protest that this is a cowardly compromise; but the stage director's business is to avoid distraction, not to make or shape the language.

13. Encourage a general cleaning up of unaccented syllables—not, however, an artificial precision in the vowel sounds. Unaccented vowels are bound to weaken and become more or less obscure, as in "Trent(o)n," "cap(a)ble," or "c(o)mplete." The obscure vowel is usually a sound between English short *u* (as in "shut") and French *eu* (as in "*pew*"),<sup>4</sup> and it is usually brief in duration; sometimes the vowel practically disappears. In some cases the short *i* sound (as in "it") can be appropriately employed in the unaccented syllables; and as far as possible this should be

<sup>4</sup> The phonetic symbol is [ə].

encouraged, because the short *i* is a clean-cut sound which carries well in the theatre, even when spoken very quickly. It is much less apt to sound muddy than the obscure vowel, and less apt to induce poor enunciation of adjacent sounds. Thus "po-im" is better than "powum" (for "poem"), and "pro-ibition" is better than "prowubition" (for "prohibition"); while "Trentin," "captin," "valit" (for "Trenton," "captain," "valet") are often heard from cultivated and clear speakers. More important than the exact shade of vowel sound in unaccented syllables is the clear enunciation of the consonants.

14. Encourage the young actor to lengthen the accented syllables rather more than is common in careless speech, giving full duration and resonance to the accented vowels. This should not be carried to the point of suggesting a deliberate drawl or a consciously artful intonation; but within reason it is one of the most effective means of clarifying stage speech.

15. Encourage a reasonable modification, rather than an abrupt dropping, of untrilled final *r* on the part of those individuals who say "mother-r-r," "father-r-r," "dear-r-r." The sound is undoubtedly ugly when given full value, being little more than a growl, but it is so widely prevalent in this country that its complete elimination, even on the professional stage, is impracticable. Many persons who fully appreciate its ugliness cannot drop it suddenly from their speech without seeming affected and unconvincing. Moreover, the complete dropping of the final *r* is just as certainly a dialectal extreme as is the exaggeration of final *r*,<sup>5</sup> and has no greater sanction in usage—less sanction, in fact, from a numerical standpoint, for comparatively few people, even in England, eliminate the sound as completely as certain teachers of elocution would have us do. In Wiltshire, for example, sixty or seventy miles west of London, the *r* begins to be heard; and in Devonshire it is even more firmly pronounced than in Philadelphia. In Scotland it is a guttural trill. If the director can get his actors to bring the *r* forward in the mouth, shorten it, and limit it to a slight curl at the end of a clear vowel he will be doing very well indeed.

<sup>5</sup> Dion Bouicault, speaking in England in 1882, said: "There is no more splendid letter in the whole alphabet than the letter *r*. Some people pronounce it like *w*. That is a misfortune that they cannot help. But the majority of you, and I dare say a great number of you who are now laughing at those who pronounce it like *w*, do not pronounce it at all. Some of you pronounce it as if it was an *h*, and when you are speaking of the Egyptian war you say 'the Egyptian wahl!' and you say 'that is rathah!' when you mean 'rather,' and 'mothah' when you mean 'mother'; whereas there are no such words in the English language."

These suggestions may be useful, but they are no substitute for good taste and good scholarship on the part of the director. Any director who means business will want to know something more about standards of pronunciation than is here set down; for references on the subject he should consult the Bibliography at the end of the book.

#### DIALECT PLAYS

Plays in local or foreign dialect involve serious difficulties for inexperienced players. As a rule, the less an actor knows about a dialect the thicker he tries to lay it on—often with distressing results. A certain degree of exaggeration is proper and necessary in the theatre, but on the other hand nothing is more painful to the audience than an obvious straining for effect. The more extreme dialects are usually easier to render than the subtler ones; they sound so strange to the ear anyhow that inaccuracies pass unnoticed. Similarly the dialects of comic or burlesque characters are ordinarily less troublesome than those of serious characters, for exaggeration is expected in burlesque, and laughter disarms criticism. It is the rendition of slight dialectal shadings in serious plays that presents the most difficult problem.

Many of the plays produced in this country are English in subject matter and authorship, and the question naturally arises whether such plays should be rendered in full English dialect. When a play is universal in theme and character, and the choice of English names and an English setting seems arbitrary or accidental, it is often advisable to ignore the dialect and to render the play as if it were American; occasionally it is possible to change the locale and the names and to omit all English allusions. When, however, a significant element of plot, theme, or character is essentially English, some suggestion of an English dialect is almost imperative if the point is not to be lost. No indication of dialect appears, as a rule, in the text—except in the case of rural, or cockney, or other type characters—and so must be supplied by the director or the actor.

In training a group of American actors to do an English play the first point is to suppress, more rigorously than usual, any Americanisms of speech—especially the excessive final *r*, the extremely nasal short *a*, the western *ah* for *aw*, and the neglect of medial *t*. The second point is to introduce the English values of long and short *o*; the long *o* is almost a diphthong consisting of short *e* (as in "get") followed by *oo* (as in

"moon"), and the short *o* is a short *aw* ("not" being simply a quicker "nought")—though many British speakers now say "not" and "got" very much as we do. The third point is to work for a suggestion of the English sentence tune, which makes use of more rising inflections and fewer falling ones than the American. It is seldom wise to attempt any general changes beyond these three, though many individual words or phrases will require attention as they occur. The purpose is usually to suggest rather than to portray, and if there is no marked inconsistency to create distraction a little positive suggestion will be sufficient. The director should not suppose that a complete representation of English speech as actually spoken in England is necessary before an American audience. Even English companies playing in America do not give us that; they find some modification almost necessary for intelligibility and for avoidance of distraction. However, the contacts between Britain and America through two world wars and the growth of international radio broadcasting have greatly lessened the unfamiliarity of British English to American ears, and there is likely to be an increasing demand for some degree of convincingness.

The director should of course remember that there are many British accents besides the London accent. In Drinkwater's *Bird-in-Hand*, for example, contrasting characters display several quite different dialects, which, if well handled, add considerably to the charm of the play. In *The Farmer's Wife*, by Eden Phillpotts, the Devonshire accent is almost essential, but a London accent would be totally false.

Plays in Irish dialect involve a somewhat less troublesome problem, especially the plays of Synge, Yeats, and their followers. The tendency of the amateur actor in an Irish part is, of course, to assume the Irish brogue of the comic strip or the vaudeville stage, and this tendency must be suppressed. Some slight modification of long and short *a*, a slight suggestion of *th* on medial *t*, and an occasional trilled *r* may be permitted, but again it is the sentence tune that is most important. Synge, especially, catches the flow of Gaelic rhythm in English words; the sentences are long and loose, with many participial constructions and many appended clauses. For this dialect the actor must have plenty of reserve breath, and must conquer the temptation to hurry and to skimp the enunciation. But the beauty of the language at its best is a great incentive to mastery, and with sufficient practice amateurs often do very well with it.

German and Yiddish dialects are among the easiest for most amateurs. The substitution of *v* for *w*, *f* for *v*, and *s* for *z*, and the pronunciation of *th* as *d* or *t* are the changes most needed. There is less modification of sentence tune in these dialects than in English or Irish, but a little more difference in manner. For the German, a more explosive utterance is usually desirable, together with a freer use of guttural sounds. For the Yiddish, more gesture is required, together with a husky or slightly nasal tone. The chief danger in these dialects, as in the Irish, is that of presenting vaudeville types instead of real people. The Pennsylvania Dutch dialect has some of the German consonant sounds but is mainly characterized by a peculiar rising inflection and by oddities of word order generally written into a play by the dramatist.

A French accent is usually suggested by an equalization of syllabic stress, and by a squeezed quality of tone accompanied by freer use of the lips (but not the jaws). The squeezing changes some of the vowel qualities, especially that of short *i* which becomes *ee*. Sometimes a slight suggestion of lisp (*th* for *s*) is helpful, though the *th* sound itself tends to become *t* or *d*.

Plays written in some of the local dialects of this country are more difficult than those involving foreign accents—except, of course, for actors native to the districts represented. This is partly because dialectal differences within our own country are apt to seem more strange and less convincing to most of us than those that are frankly exotic. We see nothing astonishing in the fact that a foreigner speaks a dialect unlike our own, but when an American does so we are a little inclined to suspect exaggeration.

Many of the best American plays written in recent years depend so much upon local color as to require careful study of dialect. The Carolina Folk Plays and others of their type use both the negroid dialect of the South and the modified Elizabethan dialect of the mountain whites. The plays of Eugene O'Neill involve a number of dialects, including those of the Negro, the Bowery roughneck, the longshoreman, the tramp sailor, and the Yankee farmer. Other writers have found their material in the Ozarks, in Texas, in the corn belt, or on the prairies. Unfortunately, some of the most important writers are peculiarly amateurish in representing dialect on paper; no department of the dramatist's art requires more professional skill than this. The amateur actor can hardly



be expected to deliver lines convincingly when they are not written convincingly; yet the director who is to produce modern plays—those of O'Neill for instance—must undertake to teach his actors to do just that thing. If he does not know the dialects thoroughly himself he is almost sure to fail.

How shall he go about studying them? A few of the most characteristic local pronunciations have already been mentioned in this chapter, but a complete catalogue of dialectal variants would occupy a large dictionary. Actual sojourn in the region to be represented, with intelligent observation and analysis of the local speech habits, is obviously the best method of study. Often it is not possible, and the director must depend upon the printed page, or upon radio broadcasts and phonograph records. The radio furnishes a disproportionate amount of certain dialects—"hillbilly" English for example—and neglects others; and an army of second-rate radio actors give many false impressions of dialect, especially in the daily "soap operas"; nevertheless, the radio, more than any other agency, has made dialectal variations familiar to our ears. Dialect dictionaries sometimes help, as do certain books and articles by trained philologists or phoneticians—especially books using phonetic script. Many colleges offering phonetics courses now have large collections of dialect recordings available for study; and a few sets of such recordings have been published for sale.

For background reading, novels are generally more helpful than plays; Mark Twain, Bret Harte, Booth Tarkington, Joseph C. Lincoln, Gene Stratton Porter, Winston Churchill, Jack London, Zane Grey, and a score of others—like Dickens, Kipling, Phillpotts, and Hardy in England—have been far more successful in conveying dialect to the reader than have most of the dramatists.

The director should strive to pick out the most suggestive features of each dialect, but should be careful not to let his actors exaggerate them unduly. At the same time he should check the probable tendency of each actor to revert to his own native speech between times; nothing is more certain to render the dialect unconvincing than excessive contrast between the points selected for emphasis and the rest of the language.

Dialect plays add considerably to the director's task, and so should be attempted only when plenty of time is available for study.



## *Organization Back Stage*

MORE amateur performances are ruined by bad management than by bad acting. Most of the calamities depicted in George Kelly's amusing satire on amateur theatricals, *The Torch Bearers*, are the result, not of lack of talent, but of managerial incompetence. Good management does not in itself make a play; there must be good acting too. But good management helps to make good acting. The sense of security that an actor feels when he knows that all the properties are in place, that everybody will make his entrance on time, that the prompter is awake and alert, and that the curtain will come down when it is supposed to come down, is the best possible cure for stage fright and a very real aid to freedom of interpretation. The director of an amateur production should see that such conditions obtain, even at the cost of some time and energy on his part.

### THE DIRECTOR AS EXECUTIVE

A successful executive back stage, as elsewhere, is something more than a hustler and an enthusiast. He is also a technician, a diplomat, and an organizer.

As a technician he must know everything about the theatre; about the mechanical, electrical, and scenic equipment of theatres; about the organization of companies and of stage crews; about methods of conducting rehearsals; about union rules, and underwriters' rules, and theatre licensing systems; about back-stage traditions and customs—in short, about everything pertaining to the whole business of production, professional as well as amateur.

As a diplomat he must know human nature, and be able to exercise tact in the handling of actors and stage crew. Knowledge of human nature is one of the most difficult things in the world to acquire, and a great deal of nonsense has been written about it. The "efficiency expert" type

of executive who can line up a row of candidates for a position and pick out the right one at a glance by the color of his eyes or the shape of his chin is either a great liar or a great fool. Snap judgment is of no use to the stage director. The kind of understanding of human nature he needs begins with humility and patience. It rests upon a sense of reciprocity, an ability to grasp the other fellow's point of view, and a willingness to study people carefully. With such an equipment the director can face difficult situations with some chance of lasting success.

But it is as an organizer that the director meets his severest test. Organization is the act of bringing things into organic and functional relationship; of uniting otherwise independent parts into a cooperative whole. The organizing type of mind is the type which is always hunting out relationships, seeking to discern order in apparent chaos, demanding not only rules but reasons for them. Such a mind is often spoken of as analytic; but it is more. It is both analytic and synthetic; it tears down only that it may learn to build up. It is logical, but not theoretical; it is imaginative, but not visionary. It is capable of evolving new schemes of relationship, but only out of an understanding of the old; it does not ignore its materials or its limitations. It is surely in some fashion methodical; yet method alone is not organization. One may be methodical without intellectual curiosity or constructive enthusiasm, and live out his life as a butler or bookkeeper or telephone operator. To the organizing mind, method is but a means to satisfy an all-powerful passion to construct.

The director cannot, of course, provide himself with a new mind; but he can cultivate some of the habits of thought which are conducive to organizing ability. Any study which helps to develop curiosity, any hobby that calls for constant rearrangement, classification, and coordination of elements, will be found beneficial.

There are two quite opposite plans of organization, and two quite opposite types of executives, one of which might be called the egocentric, and the other the mechanistic. The egocentric executive builds an organization about himself; a highly unified, smooth-working machine, which, however, needs his brain to run it. Gordon Craig's ideal director would be of this type; it is inconceivable that the masterpiece of such an artist could go on tour without him. The mechanistic type of executive seeks to build up a system that will function automatically, and will be independent of any individual, even himself. The average professional

director has to be of this type, for circumstances do not permit him to remain with the play after the run begins. The amateur director may choose either method, or he may compromise. Necessity often compels him to build about himself for the sake of insuring a good performance, the inexperience of his assistants making any other course an invitation to disaster. But the wise director who values his own time and health will seek, at least gradually, to establish an organization which will not be too dependent upon his personal presence.

#### PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION

Professional organization is not by any means uniform, especially in regard to the duties and powers of the stage director. In some instances the director is the producing manager or proprietor himself; in others he is the author of the play; in others he is the principal actor or star, and in still others he is two or three of these things at once. More often—in New York, at least—he is a hired specialist with such powers and responsibilities as the producing manager may have delegated to him.

The producing manager who directs his own productions is of course a very busy man, bearing as he does the financial and executive worries of the enterprise as well as the artistic. But he has certain advantages. Since all persons concerned in the production are his employees he can count upon a maximum of subordination and of unified effort, and a minimum of jealousy and friction. The stage attracts many temperamental persons, and there is no other method so efficacious for holding them in check as a firm grip on the purse strings. If the manager is at once a true artist and a sound business man he can perhaps harmonize the artistic and business interests of the enterprise with the least detriment to either; and though the worries of the manager may interfere with the concentration of the artist, there is compensation in the healthy freedom and the no less healthy restraint that the artist feels when he is gambling with his own money.

The producer-director is as old as the history of the theatre. So likewise is the actor-director. Both have their ancestors not only in Garrick and Shakespeare, but in the poet-actor-producers of ancient Greece.

The actor-director works under an obvious disadvantage—especially when he plays a major part. If he gives his attention to the directing he is apt to neglect his part; if he concentrates on his part he cannot maintain

the broad perspective and sense of detachment that a director ought to have. But the disadvantage is not insuperable, and sometimes the actor who has the experience, the versatility, and the scholarship to head a repertory company has also the qualifications of a good director. When this is the case an understudy may be employed to act the leading part at rehearsals. This does not relieve the actor-manager of the burden of learning his part, but it does enable him to give proper attention to the directing; and many actor-managers have used the method successfully.

Most of the plays produced in the modern commercial theatre, especially in New York, are staged by hired directors who are more or less free lances. Some of them are actors or ex-actors who happen to be unemployed; some are producing managers who have been unsuccessful in their own ventures; some are playwrights or play-doctors who have turned to directing for practical experience or for economic reasons; some are graduates of professional schools of the theatre, or of college departments of drama; some are ex-amateurs who have drifted into professional production on the crest of some little-theatre movement; some are scenic artists; some are imported European *régisseurs*; and some are former stage managers. In the latter group are some of the worst and some of the best.

The stage manager is the responsible official back stage during the run of the play; he is the representative of the producing manager, and both the company and the stage crew are responsible to him. Until comparatively recent years it was customary for the stage manager to handle the routine work of directing, larger questions of interpretation being left for decision to the producing manager, leading actor, or visiting star. In the days when an oratorical manner of production was in vogue and classical or standard plays the rule, there was less need for close-knit direction than at present; the work of the actors was more largely individual, and where teamwork was called for it tended to follow established tradition. There were no hired directors in the modern sense, and the stage managers had to be more capable as directors than they do today. Under the old repertory system these men received an excellent training, and the few who survive are among our best directors.

Under modern conditions, however, the stage manager is subordinate to the director until public performances have begun, and is sometimes a technical man rather than an artist. Some of the younger theatre-trained

stage managers who have become directors are decidedly lacking in background. They are responsible, in some degree, for the kind of mechanistic performances so often seen in the commercial theatre. As artists they are generally inferior both to the old stagers and to the better-educated directors drawn from the little theatres, universities, and technical schools, and from abroad.

When a special director is hired for a production, his duties and powers are fairly well defined. It is his business to stage the play. He seldom chooses the cast or designs the settings, though he may be called into consultation on both points. Sometimes he is not even hired until after the cast is chosen. He is given the script with certain stipulations as to the manner of production; he lays out the stage movements and proceeds to conduct the actual rehearsals; and his work theoretically ends with the final rehearsal or with the first performance. The stage manager acts as his assistant, holds the script, marks it with notes and corrections, works out the technical problems, and assumes the entire responsibility when performances begin. Often the director has the assistance of the author and the producing manager, the amount and value of such assistance depending of course upon the persons. Sometimes his chief duty is that of a pacifier, a sort of buffer between the producer and the author, or between the author and the star. For his services, lasting for from two to ten weeks, he receives a single fee, usually agreed upon in advance.

The whole system in the commercial theatre is temporary and kaleidoscopic. The production of a play is a speculation, and nobody concerned knows how long the associations formed will last. The director is, as a rule, the first to go. If the play runs a while on Broadway and then goes on the road some of the actors drop out; the younger ones especially decline to leave New York. As soon as the road tour is ended the whole organization breaks up. Hardly one-tenth of the associations formed last for a year.

The strength and the weakness of this system are evident. It makes, of course, for standardization, quantity production, and interchangeable parts. The result is a kind of all-round practical working efficiency such as is observable in cheap watches or cheap automobiles; they go, and go surprisingly well; but they are not works of art. There is nothing hand-made or custom-built about them. Plays produced under the commercial system have a certain professional snap and precision, an atmosphere of

reliability which suggests that everybody concerned knows his job. Everybody *has* to know his job, or the system would break down completely; its very life depends upon the maintenance of uniformity and efficiency. But uniformity and efficiency alone do not make great art.

#### REPERTORY ORGANIZATION

The artistic aspects of repertory have already been sufficiently discussed. In the matter of organization it is worth noting that the elements of leisure and permanency that make for good acting also make for efficiency back stage.

Many of the pre-war European theatres were subsidized, and it seems likely that this system will continue in most countries. Such theatres are planned as permanent institutions. The *régisseur* is usually an all-round man—an artist, a manager, and a teacher. He surrounds himself with a permanent staff of capable assistants, assembles a permanent company, a permanent repertory of plays, and even a permanent stage crew. As a rule he does not rent or purchase scenery or costumes; he maintains a complete stock of equipment, and when new equipment is needed he has it designed and constructed by his own staff. Usually he builds up as an adjunct to the parent theatre a studio theatre or school, in which the beginners in all departments can gain preliminary experience under the guidance of veterans.

There is a tendency in this country to overrate the European director. With one or two conspicuous exceptions he is probably no better than the American director, and when he tries to produce an American play he is often worse. But he has the advantage of a far better system.

Various phases of the European system have been imitated in this country, especially in the semi-professional little theatres and professional schools. The Neighborhood Playhouse developed a repertory system and maintained it successfully for a time. The Hedgerow Theatre, in Rose Valley, Pennsylvania, has contrived to offer repertory on a semi-professional basis for many years. But most of our attempts to establish strictly professional repertory theatres have been unsuccessful, even when subsidized, and we have no one theatre doing for the drama what the Metropolitan Opera Company does for opera. We have stock companies in many cities, and summer stock companies in many popular vacation spots, but these are for the most part very different from repertory com-

panies. They are devoted to the somewhat hasty production of a succession of plays, most of them just released for stock production after running themselves out in the larger cities; these are played, as a rule, for one or two weeks, and then shelved, and so rapid is the process that there is no time for careful study or careful direction. All too frequently the members of such companies are either young learners or old failures. Some of the so-called stock companies of an earlier period, however, were real repertory companies, playing chiefly standard plays, reviving them frequently, and adding to the repertory only now and then after a reasonable period of rehearsal. Such companies as those of Daly and Palmer in New York in the eighties, or the Arch Street Theatre Company in Philadelphia in the fifties and sixties, or the traveling companies of Booth and Barrett were, in the opinion of many old theatre-goers, almost as steady and finished as the Moscow Art Theatre Company.<sup>1</sup> For almost another generation the tradition of repertory was kept half alive by the Shakespearean companies of Mansfield, Sothorn and Marlowe, Mantell, Forbes-Robertson, Hampden, and others; but most of these were traveling companies with no permanent theatre behind them and no permanent organization; and they have largely vanished from the scene. Whether a permanently organized repertory theatre on the European basis is possible in America under present economic and industrial conditions is problematical, especially in New York; government subsidies might solve the real estate problem, but the melancholy blight of closed-shop unionism seems insurmountable.

#### AMATEUR ORGANIZATION

The amateur or little-theatre director can learn much about organization from the repertory system, as well as from the Broadway system. If he wishes to achieve the highest in artistic sincerity, if he seeks spirituality rather than mere efficiency, he will do well to study carefully the history of such a theatre as the Moscow Art Theatre. From it he may learn the importance of stability and permanence, of a close personal relationship among the players, of harmony on and off the stage, of careful, intelligent study and long, patient rehearsal, and of complete subordina-

<sup>1</sup> I was astonished to learn from a former member of the Moscow Art Theatre Company that he had been taught the history of the old American stock companies in a Russian dramatic academy before World War I, and to find that he knew almost as much of Wheatley and Drew's Arch Street Theatre as I knew myself, though my grandfather was an actor in that theatre for ten years.



tion of the individual to the artistic purpose of the group. If he is directing amateurs he may be unable to realize all of these things in their entirety; there will be limits to the amount of time he can demand of his players, and other interests on their minds; there will be petty jealousies to be suppressed and triflers to be weeded out; and there will be constant changes of personnel, especially if the group is a school or college group. But there is no reason why he should not preserve the ideals, at least, and strive to approximate them as closely as circumstances permit. If he cannot keep the same people together year after year he can at least try to keep the same spirit; he can discourage selfishness and jealousy, and emphasize the group idea, insisting that even beginners shall think of the whole play rather than their own parts; and he can conduct rehearsals with the idea of doing each play thoroughly and well. In this way he may be able to keep alive an *esprit de corps* very much like that of a famous regiment which, although it may have been shot to pieces in every war for three hundred years, is somehow still the same regiment.

#### FIXATION OF RESPONSIBILITY

The division, delegation, and fixation of responsibility is the most essential part of organization back stage, and the part most commonly neglected by amateurs. Amateurs often feel that because play production is a communal activity it should be communistic; that it should be run as a sort of inspired democracy, every member contributing according to his ability and sharing equally in the joys and benefits derived. So far as the central essence of this feeling goes, nothing could be finer; out of a truly cooperative spirit grows the best dramatic art. But in art as in politics, democracy, to be successful, must be organized; there must be not only a division of labor, but some subordination and a very definite fixation of responsibility.

In amateur organizations there is too much loose committee work and not enough individual responsibility. The matter of properties, for example, is often entrusted to a "property committee." The committee meets, and tries to make up a list of properties required; certain members of the committee promise to furnish needed articles, somebody volunteers his automobile to haul them, and everything looks very promising. But if the director is foolish enough to wait until the night of the dress re-

hearsal or of the first performance, as so many do, he may find that certain articles are missing.

"Where is the sofa?" he inquires of the chairman of the property committee.

"Why, I don't know. I thought Smith was getting that."

Smith is found, but he has an alibi. "Why no," he says, "I was going to bring mine, but Jones said he had one that was more suitable, so I left it to him. Where's Jones?"

Jones, it turns out, has been called away on a business trip. Mrs. Jones is reached by telephone, and agrees to lend the sofa if some one will come and get it. Smith goes with his automobile, but the sofa is too big, and the local expressman cannot be found. The director comes to the rescue by persuading a friend in the ice business to send one of his ice wagons<sup>2</sup> to haul the sofa, and the day is saved: Saved, that is, so far as the sofa is concerned, but in the excitement the telephone bell is quite forgotten, and remains forgotten until it is supposed to ring in the middle of the second act. It doesn't ring, and there is a case of suspended animation, until the bright young hero, stepping into the breach, says, insincerely, "Wasn't that the telephone bell?" While the audience titters he proceeds to answer the imaginary summons, and just after he gets the telephone off the hook a zealous committeeman back stage finds the bell and sets it off with a whang!

This is not exaggeration. Worse things than these occur in amateur theatricals, and occur so often that they have come to be regarded by some people as inevitable. But they are not inevitable. They do not grow out of amateur organization but out of *bad* organization; and bad organization can occur on the professional stage as well as the amateur. In one performance of a "follies" show at the Shubert Theatre in Philadelphia I saw no less than five major "breaks"; in one instance the curtain was run up between acts with the scene half set and the stage carpenter in a very undignified position at stage center. The same thing occurred at the same theatre during a performance of Balieff's *Chauve Souris*. Even the Moscow Art Theatre is not immune—on tour, at least. In a performance of *Tsar Fyodor* at the old Lyric Theatre in Philadelphia, the back-

<sup>2</sup> A mummy case which I made for *The Man Who Came to Dinner* has been loaned for seven different productions of that play. The last time it came back in an undertaker's car and was carried into my office by a polished gentleman in black!

stage lights were so arranged as to throw on the rear wall of the Tsar's palace a huge shadow of a stage hand manipulating an olivette. At a performance of *Pride and Prejudice* in St. Louis I saw a whole set leap two feet in the air when a downhaul rope broke. And I once saw a professional stage manager take half an hour to place properties for the first act of *The Admirable Crichton* because he did it by guesswork, memory, and head scratching, when he could have done it in ten minutes with a regular property-plot.

These things are exceptional, of course. Usually the professional performance is smoother and surer than the amateur, not because it is professional but because it is better organized; and the chief difference is in fixation of responsibility.

#### THE PRODUCTION STAFF

Instead of a group of irresponsible committees the director should surround himself with a firmly organized production staff.

The head of the production staff is the stage manager, and a reliable stage manager is the greatest possible help to the director. The stage manager takes entire charge of the production subject to the director's orders. He organizes the stage crew, arranges for the making or hiring of scenery, properties, and costumes, summons the actors to rehearsal, sees that they are called for their cues, holds and marks the prompt book, and in every way relieves the director of executive detail. He bears the same relation to the director that the executive officer bears to the captain on a ship, or the adjutant to his commanding officer in the army; and the efficiency of the system is well attested by the fact that it has been retained in the armies and navies of the world. The best thing a director can do for his organization is to train and develop a good stage manager.

The stage manager, in turn, will require one or more assistants, the number depending upon the degree of elaboration in equipment and production. In an organization that is necessarily subject to constant change of personnel, as in a school or college, the assistants should be definitely trained to succeed the stage manager in order of seniority. Each assistant should have some one part of the work of production delegated to him, and should be directly responsible to the stage manager for its efficient execution. He should be given credit in the program for his particular contribution.

When an organization designs and builds its own equipment the production staff must, of course, be fairly large. There must be some one to design the scenery, a stage carpenter to build it, and a property man to make the properties. There must be some one to design the costumes, and a master (or mistress) of wardrobe to care for them, and to be responsible for having new ones made. There must be a technician to supervise the stage lighting, and a musical director to arrange the incidental music. Each of these officials may need one or more assistants, and in elaborate productions the stage manager himself will need an assistant not otherwise engaged to divide responsibility with him and to act as prompter. The actual stage crew may vary in size with the needs of the production, but will always include a stage carpenter, a property man, and an electrician, with as many assistants as are needed.

If the organization is strictly amateur, playing at all times in its own theatre or clubhouse, these various duties may be combined or doubled up in any way that seems to fit the personnel. But if the organization wishes to articulate at any time with the commercial theatre, even to the extent of hiring a licensed theatre for a single performance, the division of labor should be as nearly like that of the professional stage crew as possible; otherwise there may be a disastrous conflict with union rules.

#### UNIONIZED STAGE CREWS

The matter of union rules, and of ironclad division of labor, is a serious problem in the commercial theatre, and no amateur stage manager or director who expects to come in contact with that theatre in any way can afford to be ignorant of the situation.

In most cities of the United States the stage hands are thoroughly unionized and entirely committed to the principle of the closed shop. In each theatre there are three so-called "heads of departments," the stage carpenter, the stage electrician, and the property man. In some cities the law requires that the first two of these shall be licensed artisans. The heads of the departments are members of the union, and will not work with non-union help; they dictate to the stage manager how many assistants they are to have for each play, and the union backs up their demand. The electrician uses as many assistants as in his judgment are necessary to handle the various lights placed about the stage without compelling him to leave the switchboard himself. The general rule is a man for

every light. The property man engages enough "clearers," as his assistants are called, to carry off all the movable properties of one act and carry on those of the next simultaneously; he seldom carries anything himself, though he does design and make properties, and sometimes condescends to manipulate back-stage effects which he is unwilling to trust to persons of inferior intellect. Between acts he bosses the clearers, and flourishes a hammer, with which he nails rickety objects in place. The stage carpenter is in charge of the actual settings, that is to say the walls and ceilings, the flats, wings, drops, and curtains. He has two classes of assistants, the "flymen," who remain in the fly gallery above the stage to raise and lower such parts of the set as are hung on the "lines" and to manipulate the curtain; and the "grips," who handle the pieces of scenery upon the stage floor. A grip to every flat is not an uncommon rule in elaborate productions where quick changes are necessary; and union flymen are never asked to strain themselves by lifting too much weight singlehanded. The stage carpenter is usually regarded as the general head of the entire crew, and in some cities is held responsible under his license for all mechanical arrangements back stage. Like the property man he often carries a hammer, but his chief symbol of office is a long pole, with which he clears the drops or ceilings as they are lowered by the flymen upon the flats or wings.

The three classes of labor performed by these three divisions of the crew are very sharply defined. The carpenter and his crew handle only the actual settings. The property men handle all movable objects, including "hand props," furniture, bric-a-brac, and even such heavy set pieces as fireplaces, rocks, or trees; they also provide all back-stage effects, except electrical ones. The electricians handle only electrical effects. No grip would dare lay a finger on a table or chair, much less move it; and if a clearer were to remove the electric bulb from a fireplace he would be liable to a heavy fine or expulsion from the union.

The entire stage crew, under the direction of its department heads, takes orders from the stage manager, or from the assistant stage manager if there is one. The stage manager is not a union man; he represents the employer—in effect, *is* the employer. Union rules cannot prevent the stage manager or his assistants from moving or adjusting or otherwise handling articles on the stage, so long as sufficient stage hands are employed and paid; but let it once appear that the stage manager is employ-

ing a number of assistants and doing bodily work himself by way of economy, or as a subterfuge to replace union with non-union help, and there is likely to be a strike on the spot.

The plan of organization is in general not unlike that in a closed-shop factory. The head of a department is analogous to the foreman of a gang of laborers; he is a union man, but is classed a little above the rest, and receives a little more pay. The stage carpenter is in some instances analogous to a head foreman. The stage manager, however, is equivalent to a factory superintendent; he is an employee, but a salaried employee rather than a wage earner. The director, in the modern scheme of organization, is a little like the engineer in industry—a professional expert, standing a little apart from the direct organization, but having certain powers over it.

When an elaborate production goes on tour, the producing manager often finds it advisable to send the heads of departments along with it, and sometimes even the complete crew. The handling of intricate scenery, and especially of lighting effects, requires practice, and it is not always safe to depend upon the house crew in a road theatre. In such cases the company crew and the house crew work together, the men taking orders from their own heads, and the house heads taking orders from the company heads. The house electrician always runs the house switchboard; the company electrician may stand by him and tell him what to do. It goes without saying that the company crew must be unionized; otherwise the house crew will not work with them. As it is, there is sometimes much jealousy, especially if the company crew is large and it appears that local hands are being kept out of employment. Local unions often demand the employment of a full crew by the house, even if the company crew is large enough to handle the entire production.

The stage-hands' unions are affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, as are the musicians' unions and the Actors' Equity Association—though there is a constant struggle for jurisdiction between the A. F. of L. and the C. I. O. in this as in other fields. The musicians, like the stage hands, insist upon a closed shop; and these two groups support each other. The employment of a non-union orchestra, or even of an amateur orchestra, may therefore result in the stage hands going out on strike just when the play is about to open; conversely the orchestra may refuse to serve if it discovers that no union stage crew is employed. A hired

orchestra composed of union musicians will sometimes accept engagements to play at strictly amateur affairs outside the regular theatres; but if a delegate of the stage-hands' union comes to them and says, "Look here, these people are handling a lot of scenery and we have a lot of men out of work. We are going to make them hire a union crew, and it's up to you fellows to back us up," the orchestra is likely to quit at the most inconvenient moment, with an ultimatum to the management demanding the hiring of a union crew. In some cities the stage hands will not touch scenery that is hauled to the theatre by non-union expressmen, and in some instances have declined to handle scenery not built by union labor. If a show is to be moved from one theatre to another right next door, one crew will move the scenery out to the sidewalk, and the other will move it in from its own sidewalk; but neither will move it from one sidewalk to the next, or permit non-union help to do so. That must be done by a union trucking concern.

The attitude of the unions officially, and of the men personally, is not generally unfriendly to amateurs, but here and there will be found a local union leader who is not above holding them up for whatever he can get out of them. I know, for I have been held up myself. I was once compelled by a union leader to use eleven paid stage hands, in addition to the three heads of departments, to work a theatre that I can handle, and have handled, with a crew of five or six college students. In the light of such possibilities the amateur director with executive responsibilities must be constantly on his guard. He will find it expedient to make all his arrangements and contracts some time ahead, and to get them all down in writing.

The Actors' Equity Association did not at first stand for a closed shop, or for a great deal of active cooperation with the other unions; but in 1924 it went on a closed-shop basis. The attitude of Equity, however, has been, and probably will be, friendly to honest amateur effort. The members of Equity are professional people, some of whom at least have a profound distaste for unionizing methods, and accept such methods only because they have been forced to do so by the conscienceless behavior of a few powerful managers. They have nothing against the amateur, and less against the student player in school or college. They very naturally object when a commercial manager employs too many amateurs as "extras" while Equity members are out of employment, especially if they have

reason to think he is doing so rather to save money than to provide deserving students with experience. But they do not object to the occasional employment of non-union extras, or to the occasional association of professional actors as guest players with semi-professional or amateur companies. In other words they do not object to the professional amateur, but do object to the non-union professional.

In respect to the attitude of the unions, conditions vary somewhat in different parts of the country, and the director will do well to familiarize himself with those of his own locality. They also vary from year to year.

#### BUILDING AND FIRE LAWS

Besides the union rules the director should know the rules of the local fire marshal, the underwriters, and the city police, and perhaps the building laws. In many cities amateur clubs and playhouses are not licensed, and are not under control of the fire marshal. In some states any theatre seating one hundred persons is subject to theatre laws—which is why you often find a small theatre with ninety-nine seats. The buildings are generally subject to the building laws, and can be insured only under the rules of the underwriters. There are usually some restrictions regarding seating arrangements and floor and roof construction, and there is usually a rule requiring a four-foot aisle, and perhaps a rule requiring exit lights. But generally speaking the amateur club in its own clubhouse has much more freedom than a commercial theatre.

The commercial theatre is nearly always subject to license, and under strict inspection. The construction and arrangement must be approved by the building inspectors, underwriters, and fire marshal. The safety appliances must be tested before each performance, and in some cities a fireman is stationed behind the scenes at every performance. Smoking is usually prohibited except in special smoking rooms of fireproof construction, or when necessary on the stage to portray character, and in the latter case the actor is sometimes required to report to the fireman in the wings before going on. All exit doors must be kept unlocked. Scenery must be fireproof; and many an amateur company renting a professional theatre has had artistic settings spoiled by a hasty last-minute application of chemicals.

The fireproofing of scenery is a troublesome problem, especially in the case of curtain settings. Canvas flats can be fireproofed from the back



(preferably before painting) by spraying with a saturated solution of alum, and the process has little effect upon their appearance; but curtains and draperies tend to stiffen up when sprayed, and sometimes to show stains or changes of color. When expensive draperies are to be fireproofed, it is a good plan to consult a textile chemist, for he will know the best method of treating the particular fabric. In renting scenery it is always wise to make sure that it has been fireproofed. It is never wise to neglect the fireproofing or let it go till the last minute. The fire marshal has a very effective method of testing the scenery: he holds a match to it. If it is not properly fireproofed the asbestos curtain does not rise, and the audience goes home.

As a rule the fire marshal requires that the scene be struck between performances and a fire light left burning at stage center so that a patrolman on the street can see right through the theatre to the back of the stage. Asbestos fire curtains are almost always required; they must be up when the house is empty, but down when the audience is admitted and until they leave, except during the actual performance; in some cities they must be down between acts. Exits, both in front and back stage, must be kept clear, and overcrowding is prohibited; in some theatres the sale of standing room is not permitted.

For the non-enforcement of these and other rules heavy fines are provided, and amateurs playing in a licensed theatre are held responsible for observing them on the same basis as professionals.

#### SCENE, LIGHT, AND PROPERTY PLOTS

In planning the work of the stage crew it is usual to employ written outlines or lists known as "plots." The stage carpenter gets a "scene plot," which shows, by acts and scenes, how the stage is to be set; often it includes sketches or diagrams, as well as lists of the needed items. One well-organized community theatre has printed scale diagrams of its stage; and each director (or his technical director) uses a copy to lay out his set to scale (Fig. 15), using different colored pencils for different scenes and marking the numbers of the flats in their proper locations. The property man gets a "property plot," listing both the "stage props" (properties to be placed upon the stage by the property men) and the "hand props" (properties to be furnished to the actors who carry them on), also by acts and scenes. In some modern realistic plays the property plot reads like

the catalogue of a mail-order house. The electrician gets a "lighting plot" stating clearly how the switchboard is to be set for each scene; where the strip lights, flood lights, and spot lights are to be placed; and how all those lights are to be manipulated if changes are called for during the scene (Fig. 16; see also Appendix, page 409).

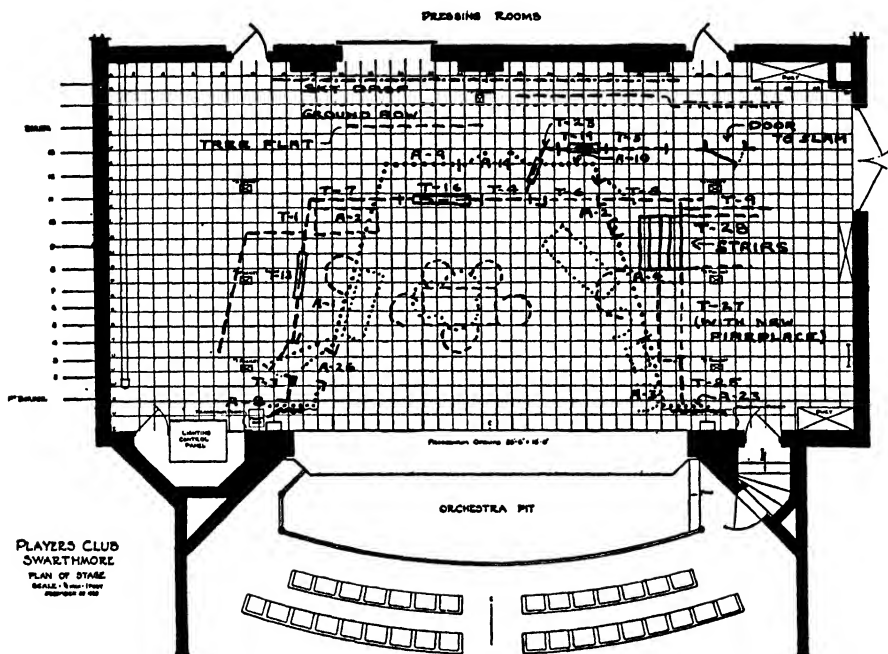


FIG. 15. METHOD OF LAYING OUT SCENE PLOTS.

Printed copies of the blank stage plan are furnished each director, on which he can indicate to exact scale the layout he wishes. This sample is for *The Farmer's Wife*; the long dashes (blue lines in the original) show Acts I and III, the dotted lines (red in the original) show Act II. Both sets were stock sets; numbers refer to the individual flats.

Light changes, quick shifts of scenery or properties, off-stage and trick effects are governed by "cues" in the lines of the play, and these cues should always be entered on the proper plots. They should also be entered on the margin of the prompt book, with warning cues a few lines ahead so that the prompter can "alert" the persons involved. Difficult effects, of course, should always be well rehearsed.

Scene changes should also be plotted, especially where smoothness and speed are desired. The number of hands should be fixed, and each given

a number, letter, or other designation, even though the personnel may vary at different performances. For each position there should be an in-

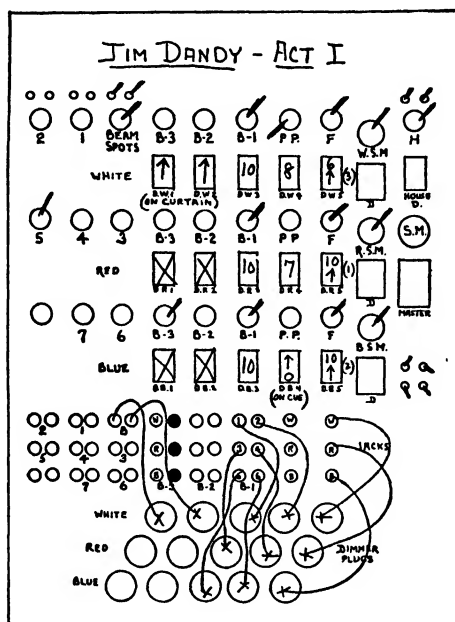


FIG. 16. LIGHT PLOT FOR SETTING CONTROL BOARD.

Printed forms are used for the board shown in Plate 32, b; on them the electrician marks up the setting for his board, using a separate sheet for each act or scene. Each switch is indicated by a printed circle; a pencil mark indicates whether it is to be up ("pre-set"), or down ("hot"). An unmarked circle means circuit not in use. In this case only one circuit is hot (for the prompter's desk); all others in use are pre-set through the sub-masters, which are pre-set through the stage main. The rectangles indicate dimmers, and the penciled figures their settings. The tie-lines at the bottom show which dimmers are plugged in on which circuits; four dimmers are idle.

struction sheet showing just what moves the worker is to make at each change, and in what order. Electrical helpers and property helpers should be included as well as grips and flymen. The stage manager should have a master copy. (See Appendix, page 406.)

For purposes of checking up, the stage manager should have copies of all plots. In amateur productions it is a wise plan for the director to keep extra copies himself, so that he can go quietly about just before the first performance and check everybody else. Any extra trouble that this may give him will be more than compensated for by his ensuing peace of mind.

Extreme care should be taken to see that every correction of a plot is entered on all copies.

Besides the plots for the three heads of departments, some directors like to employ a costume plot, a make-up plot, a curtain-call plot—in short, a plot for every problem of management involved. Others dislike so much rigmarole; but a certain amount of rigmarole is far better than something forgotten.

#### RUNNING THE PERFORMANCE

Some time before the dress rehearsal the director should see that the prompt copy is properly annotated with call warnings, curtain warnings, and all necessary warnings and cues for off-stage effects. Strictly speaking, this is the stage manager's responsibility, but unless the stage manager is a very capable and experienced person the director will do well to see to it himself. For each entrance of a character there should be a marginal note, perhaps a page in advance, reminding the prompter to "call So-and-So," and during the performance the prompter should have a "call boy" at his elbow to go after each actor in plenty of time for his entrance cue.

The call boy is an ancient and useful institution in the professional theatre, and it is a pity that amateurs do not know him better. Before the performance he goes about back stage and among the dressing rooms calling the time intervals—"Forty-five minutes!"—"Thirty minutes!"—"Fifteen minutes!"—"Ten minutes!"—"Overture!" Before each act he checks up on the actors who are supposed to be "on" for the next curtain, or ready to enter shortly after. Having seen that these actors are ready he reports back to the prompter, who thus knows when it is safe to ring up the curtain. During the act the call boy stands by the prompter so that he may be sent to call the actors as they are needed, to check up on the stage hands who are supposed to execute off-stage effects, and to do any other necessary errands for the prompter.

These are little things, but tremendously important, and commonly neglected by amateurs. If attended to at all they are usually attended to by the stage manager or the director himself, but since both of these officials have other responsibilities and either may be interrupted or called aside at any moment it is not safe for them to depend upon themselves for routine tasks. A good stage manager will keep a watchful eye on his prompter and his call boy, and a good director will keep a watchful eye

on the stage manager as well; but a good call boy and a good prompter would save many an amateur performance from raggedness.

Many theatres are now equipped with microphones on stage and loudspeakers in the green rooms and dressing rooms, so that the actors may pick up their own warnings and gauge their time for costume changes. This system is a convenience, but not nearly so effective a check on the absent-minded player as a good call boy.

The work of the prompter is in itself an art. No one can prompt effectively unless he has attended a number of rehearsals and followed the text carefully. He must learn to know each actor's style, and to know whether he is pausing for effect or has forgotten his lines, for nothing is more annoying to the actor than to be prompted unnecessarily. The prompter should note carefully the probable danger points, the lines on which the actor repeatedly stumbles, and should be ready to help him. Sometimes an actor prefers to have an understanding with the prompter and a method of signaling to him when he needs a prompt. In general the prompter should not be *too* helpful at rehearsals, but should plan to be infallible at the first performance. With the help of the actor on the stage and the director in the auditorium he should try out his voice in advance, to determine how best to project it to the actors at various points on the stage with the least likelihood of its being heard by the audience. Far better to be too loud than not loud enough; nothing is more noticeable to the audience and upsetting to the actor than a prompt repeated several times so cautiously that the actor cannot get it.

Over the prompter's desk there should be a large and conspicuous sign: **DO NOT TALK TO THE PROMPTER!**

The wise director will assign every back-stage task to some one else, leaving no specific duty for himself except to check up on the others. But unless his people are thoroughly experienced he will trust nobody, especially at the first performance. He will check up on the stage manager to see that the actors and crew are all present and accounted for, and that all last-minute managerial tasks have been performed. He will check up on the stage carpenter to see that the scene is properly set, on the property man to see that all properties are in place and all effects ready, and on the electrician to see that the lights are in place and that he has his cues; and he will repeat this process before each act. He will check up on the costumes and make-ups before each act, and upon the hand props which the

actors are to carry. He will check up on the prompter and call boy to see that all actors are ready before the curtain is rung up; and during each act he will check up on the calls and warnings to see that nothing is missed. In all of this work he will be greatly assisted if he has before him written memoranda systematically prepared in advance. But on no account should he let his subordinates know that he is going to check them up in this way, lest they depend too much upon him.

It is needless to say that the necessity for such careful supervision varies inversely with the experience of the group. Most professional directors would regard the procedure here outlined as unnecessarily elaborate. But a little excess of care in managerial matters sometimes gives an amateur production a smoothness that is highly pleasing—even astonishing—to the audience, and elicits words of thankful praise from any newspaper critics who may, in their martyrdom, have been obliged to attend.

When amateur directors, generally, begin to realize that the obligation to good management and smooth performance is even greater upon them than upon professionals, as being the only possible compensation for their natural shortcomings and the only means of bringing out their best talents, then amateur dramatics will be taken seriously by those who really love the art of the theatre and are not content with good-natured inferiority.



## *The Genesis of Scenic Art*

WE HAVE now to consider what to some modern directors is the most important problem in play production: the problem of scenic investiture. In recent decades so much attention has been given to this matter, and so many styles and movements have developed, that an adequate study would occupy several volumes. I shall attempt no more than a brief summary. But for the most elementary understanding of modern scenic art some slight notion of the past history of the theatre is necessary.

The drama cannot be said to have begun at any particular time or place. It has begun many times, and is always beginning over again somewhere in the world, and almost always in the same way: as an outgrowth of religious ceremonial. First there is a festival celebration of some kind, with tribal dancing, musical or rhythmic accompaniment, song, and spectacle, the purpose being to honor or placate some god, or through magic incantation to bring about good crops or success in battle. The theatre, at first, is but an area set apart for the participants, with the spectators standing round about. Costume and decoration are at first purely religious or magic in significance. After a time the mimetic element begins to creep in; there is symbolic movement in the dancing, then direct pantomime, and finally acting. At some point in the process the people begin to discover that the performance is interesting in itself apart from its religious meaning, and from that point the secular element grows rapidly and the religious purpose is soon replaced by a more or less frankly theatrical one. So often and so independently has this process recurred in different countries and different ages that we are forced to regard it as natural.

At what point in the process the playing space becomes a theatre and the decorations a setting depends upon definitions and circumstances. The modern drama is said to have begun in the religious ritual, not of a primitive tribe, but of the highly organized medieval church; and for that

reason, unlike most drama, it began indoors. It used the church for its first theatre, and later the space outside the church, with the church as background. But the modern theatre, in its architectural and scenic arrangements, cannot be fully explained in terms of this origin; it has its roots in an older theatre, and to trace its development we must go back to ancient Greece.

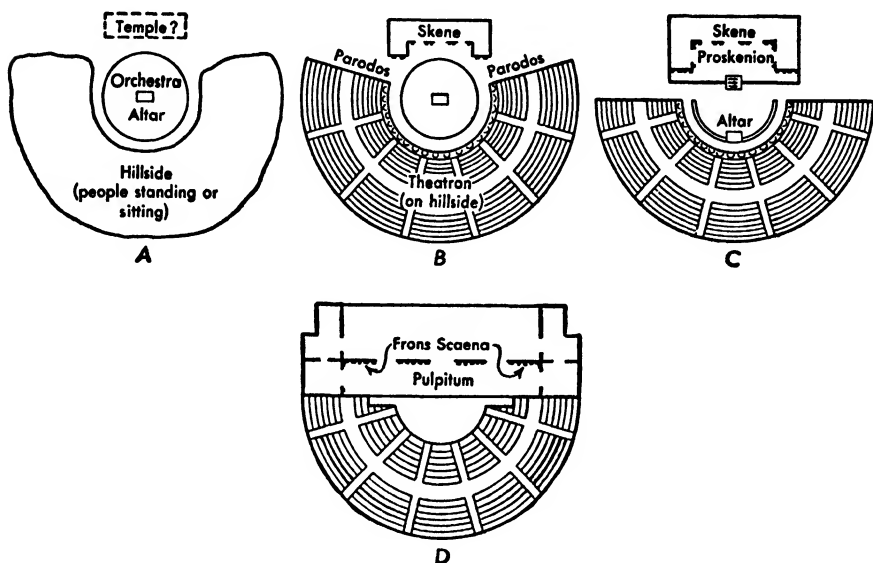


FIG. 17. EVOLUTION OF THE GREEK AND ROMAN THEATRE.

A indicates the probable beginning of the Greek theatre in the *orchestra*. B shows a typical theatre of pure Greek design; C a Greek theatre remodeled by the Romans; and D a typical Roman theatre.

### THE GREEK THEATRE

Greek drama originated in the ceremonial dances and choral singing in honor of Dionysus, the god of wine, who was conceived to imbue his devotees with a kind of spiritual (perhaps not unmingled with spirituous) ecstasy. For the purpose of these ceremonial dances a circular space called an *orchestra* (ὄρχήστρα), or "dancing place," was marked out on the ground at the foot of a hill. That circle was the beginning of the Greek theatre, and so of the modern theatre.

The evolution of the Dionysian festival dances into the classical drama was a matter of centuries, and little is known about it. Tragedy and



comedy appear to have had separate origins, the latter growing out of ribald mummeries and street processions and only appearing in the *orchestra* at a later stage. The introduction of the actor, as distinct from the chorus, is generally credited to Thespis, a poet who lived at Icaria about 535 B.C. Some time in the sixth century the custom arose of holding contests and giving prizes for the best dramatic choruses, and it may have been in connection with such a contest that Thespis made his innovation. The idea of acting was surely not his invention, for there had been strolling clowns and entertainers before his time, but he seems to have been the first to see the possibilities of the mimetic element in relation to the Dionysian festival. What he did was to provide a single actor (probably himself) who, assuming several different masks in succession, engaged in dialogue with the chorus and illustrated the thought with pantomimic action, thereby achieving variety and giving the chorus an occasional rest. It was Æschylus (525-456 B.C.), the first of the great Attic dramatists, who added the second actor; and Sophocles (497-406 B.C.), the last of the great ones, who added the third. At no time in the Golden Age were more than three actors employed in the tragic drama, although by changing their masks these three represented many characters.

The *orchestra* in the true Greek theatre was circular; it is so, for instance, in the theatre at Epidaurus, one of the few preserved today supposedly not modified by the Romans. At first there was nothing but the *orchestra*, with an altar in the center, and the spectators merely stood or sat about on the hillside. Later, wooden seats were built, and the auditorium came to be known as a *theatron* (θέατρον), or "seeing place." Later still—probably not until after the drama had reached its height—the wooden benches were replaced by stone.

The *orchestra* and the *theatron* existed for a long time before the introduction of the actor made necessary a dressing room to which he could retire to change costume. The dressing room built for the purpose was called a *skene* (σκηνή), meaning a "hut" or "shelter," and was at first a very simple temporary structure, placed near the orchestra circle on the side opposite the audience. Later it was made more elaborate, and its possibilities as a background for the action came to be recognized; but it was still of wood in the time of Æschylus, and perhaps as late as the time of Sophocles. After the decline of Attic poetry the theatres were greatly

elaborated, and the scene buildings were built of stone and ornamented with columns. At an unknown date a second story was added, and the roof of the first story made to project in a sort of ledge known as the *proskenion*; in some scenes actors representing the gods may have spoken from this ledge, and for a long time it was believed that the Greeks used

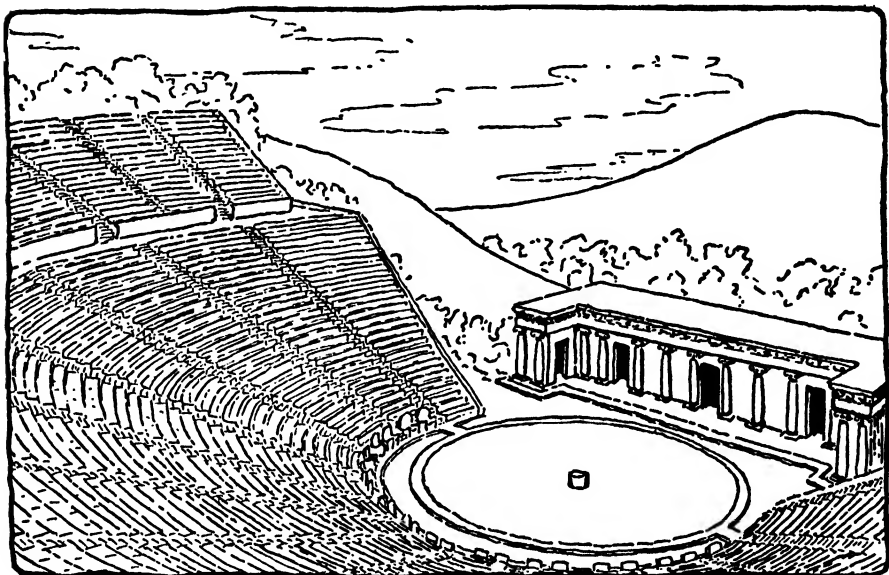


FIG. 18. A GREEK THEATRE.

Conjectural sketch, showing the probable arrangement of the late fifth century, B.C. The side doors in the *paraskenia* are doubtful, and may not have appeared until later. Note that the seats unmistakably face the *orchestra* rather than the *skene*.

it regularly as a very high stage. The action of the great classic drama in the fifth century, however, certainly took place on the ground, either in the *orchestra* or in the space between it and the scene building; and the first use of the raised *proskenion* was doubtless comparable to that of the balcony in the Elizabethan theatre or the window representing "heaven" in the Chinese, rather than to that of a modern stage.

The typical *skene* of Sophocles' time was rectangular in shape, with small side wings or *paraskenia*, and with three doors opening on the ground level, the center one of which was the focal point of the action. There is no evidence that the Greeks ever attempted to represent scenic background in other than a roughly symbolic way, but that they did use

something in the way of painted scenery, at least for suggestion, even Aristotle bears witness. What it was like nobody knows. In late times they made use of three-sided prisms called *periaktoi*, placed at either side of the playing space, and capable of being revolved so as to show three different painted decorations—one representing palaces and symbolizing the background of tragedy; the second picturing common dwellings and symbolizing comedy; the third showing fences and trees and symbolizing the rustic satyr play. There are enough references to change of location in the Greek drama to indicate that they knew the use of stage properties and furniture as suggesting place; and there are many references in ancient writing to the elaborate mechanical devices of the Greek stage. These include the *eccyclema*, by which bits of indoor setting or furniture appear to have been rolled out of the scene building on a wagon or turntable; the *exostra*, a similar device (perhaps the same one under a different name); and the *machine*, or crane, by which actors representing the gods were brought down from the roof of the *skene*. There were, in other words, many attempts in the Greek theatre to startle or impress the audience with realistic exploits, but there was never any attempt at complete representative illusion.

#### THE ROMAN THEATRE

In Rome the theatre was not a public religious institution as in Greece; it existed for entertainment. But it borrowed heavily from the Greek theatre, both in its scenic arrangements and in its drama.

Prior to the Greek influence the Romans were familiar with the entertainment provided by strolling clowns and jugglers, who performed as a rule upon improvised platform stages with the audience standing about on the ground level (Fig. 20). To the Romans, therefore, entertainment implied a stage, and the most important modification they made in the Greek theatre when they came to adapt it to their own uses was the expansion of the raised stage and the elimination of the *orchestra* as a playing space. In the later Greek theatres built or rebuilt under Roman influence, a compromise plan was adopted, both stage and *orchestra* being used; but in the true Roman theatres the action was confined to the stage, and the *orchestra* used as seating space for the senators.

The typical Roman theatre was semi-circular in shape, with the stage, scene building and auditorium constructed as a single unit. The scene

building was much larger than in the Greek theatre, with massive side wings, and with an elaborate proscenium wall decorated with columns and pediments. Usually there were three doors in this wall, the center one much the largest, with two more in the side wings, taking the place of the open passageways between *skene* and *theatron* in the Greek theatre. A sloping roof usually covered the stage, and in hot or stormy weather an awning was stretched over the audience.

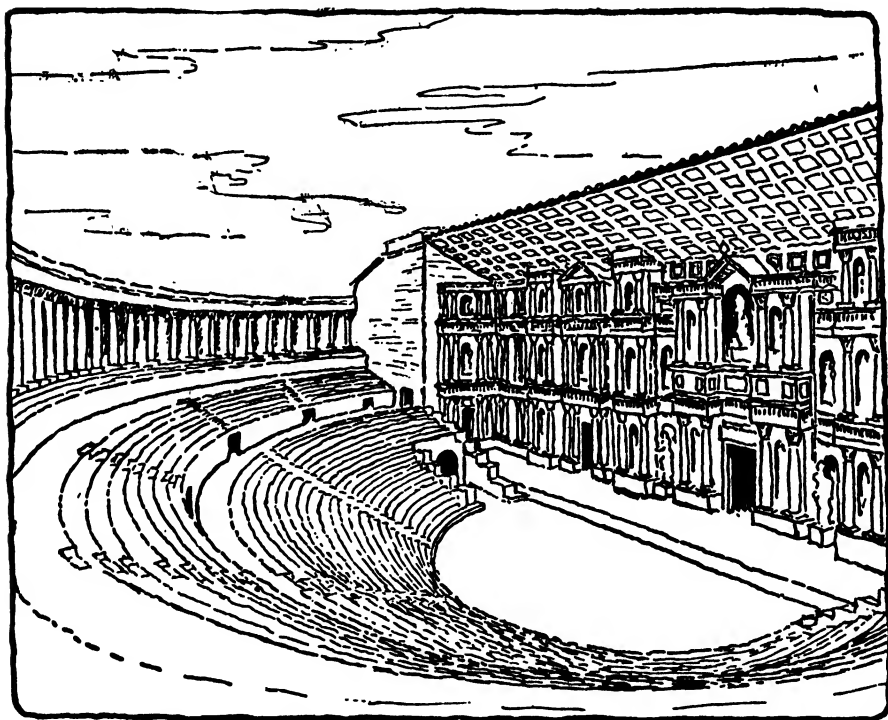


FIG. 19. A ROMAN THEATRE.

Conjectural sketch. Note that the seats face more nearly toward the proscenium wall and stage than in the Greek theatre.

There is no trustworthy evidence as to the amount of scenic decoration used by the Romans in addition to the architectural background, but it is supposed that they sometimes used painted cloths hung against the proscenium wall or in the doorways, and they may have used *periaktoi*. In some cases they used curtains to conceal the whole stage, as in the modern theatre (except that these rolled up from the bottom instead of down from

the top), and this would hardly have been necessary unless the setting was to be changed. Certainly Roman writings suggest even more elaborate attempts than in the Greek theatre to startle with bits of realism, though it is likely that these involved the use of stage properties rather than true scenery. In Rome, as in Greece, there was no realistic completeness.

In late Roman times the drama degenerated, the theatre growing more elaborate as poetry declined. Intricate stage machinery and realistic spectacles like mimic sea battles, parades, and triumphs took the place of real plays; these eventually gave way to animal-baiting and gladiatorial exhibitions, and the drama practically died out.

### THE MEDIEVAL THEATRE

Through the so-called Dark Ages there was little real drama in Europe, though the classic tradition in this and other matters was never as wholly lost as historians used to believe. There were strolling minstrels, clowns, and jugglers in ancient Rome, and it is probable that these never ceased to exist even in the darkest centuries. The idea of public entertainment

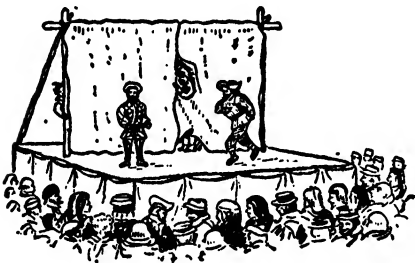


FIG. 20. A PRIMITIVE PLATFORM STAGE.

in some form persisted, and with it the idea of a rough platform stage set up in the street or public square. The simplest form of platform stage, with a curtained retiring space at the back (Fig. 20), appears to have been known from the earliest times in many countries, and has doubtless been reinvented independently whenever the need has arisen.

When the religious drama came out of the churches and was taken over by the guilds the platform stage was thus already familiar, and was quickly adapted to the new purpose. The guilds elaborated it, of course. On the Continent they developed various types of booth stages, and also the long platform stage with simultaneous settings representing various localities in Biblical history from Heaven at one end to Hellmouth at the other, like the famous one at Valenciennes.<sup>1</sup> In England they developed the wagon stage, which could be dragged about from place to place, setting and all. Except, however, for the elaboration of stage properties and set

<sup>1</sup> Illustrated in Macgowan, *The Theatre of Tomorrow*; Nicoll, *The Development of the Theatre*; Cheney, *The Theatre*; and elsewhere.

pieces, the guild stages had very little influence upon the subsequent history of scenic art.

### THE RENAISSANCE THEATRE

During the Renaissance there was a great revival of interest in all things classical, including the drama, and the architects who were called upon to design theatres naturally attempted to imitate the classical mode. They had two chief sources of inspiration: the writings of Vitruvius and the ruins of the buildings themselves. But the Roman ruins were more familiar than the Greek, and Vitruvius, a first-century Roman architect, had interpreted the Greek and early Roman theatre in terms of his own age, so that both these sources of inspiration were distinctly Roman. The result was that the Renaissance theatres came to be Roman also, with one important modification; they were indoor theatres, completely roofed over, and artificially lighted.

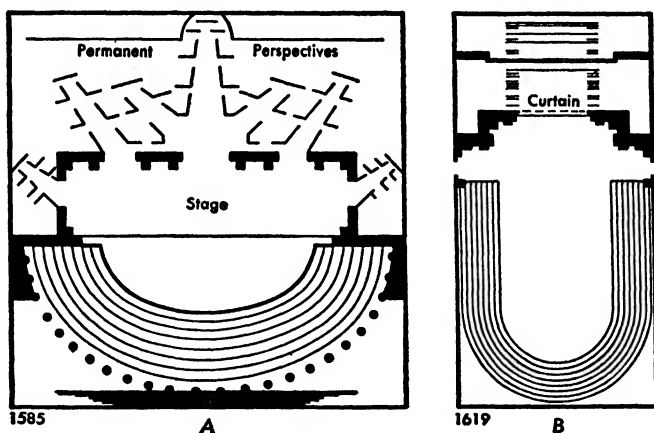


FIG. 21. TWO TYPES OF RENAISSANCE THEATRES.

*A* represents the general plan of the Olympic Theatre at Vicenza, and shows the arrangement of the perspectives built by Scamozzi. *B* is a rough plan of the Farnese Theatre at Parma, the first to show a modern proscenium frame with flush curtain.

The first Renaissance theatres were those of the Italian courts, and were often merely converted ballrooms with temporary stages. On these stages were set up elaborate scenes in false perspective, erroneously supposed to conform to the practice of the ancients. Vitruvius had described the principles of perspective, and had attributed its invention to the Greeks. He

had also made reference—in a somewhat obscure passage<sup>2</sup>—to the three types of ancient settings, the tragic, the comic, and the satyric. This passage is now believed to indicate the ancient method of decorating the *periaktoi* or other painted panels for suggestive symbolism, but the Renaissance architects took it to mean that whole settings in the ancient theatre were built up in artificial perspective; and with that understanding they proceeded to indulge in an orgy of perspective that swept over the theatres of Italy, France, and England, and dominated the history of scenic art for three centuries. An Italian architect named Serlio, writing in 1545, described and illustrated the three types of ancient settings, and gave explicit directions for the arrangement of a perspective stage; his book exercised a wide influence, and was translated into several other languages, the English edition appearing in 1611 (Fig. 22).

Next to the writings of Serlio the most important influence in spreading the craze for perspective scenery was the Olympic Theatre at Vicenza, designed by Palladio, and built between 1580 and 1585. It was a direct imitation of a Roman theatre, with the auditorium made wider and shallower, and entirely roofed over. Palladio having died before its completion, Scamozzi, another architect, added in 1585 the famous perspective vistas which for over four centuries have been seen and admired by visitors from many lands (*A*, Fig. 21, and Plate 2-a). Behind each doorway in the proscenium wall Scamozzi set up a series of built units representing the corners of buildings on either side of a receding street, suggesting by their diminishing size a distance much greater than the actual distance to the artificial vanishing point. The central doorway was larger than the others, and the vista more elaborate, and this feature seems to have greatly impressed Inigo Jones, the English architect, who visited Vicenza in 1613. A sketch of his, found in his copy of Palladio, indicates that he thought of still further enlarging the center door into a kind of proscenium arch, with the space within the vista added to the playing space (Plate 2-b). Some historians regard this sketch as the progenitor of the modern proscenium arch, but there is no evidence that Jones ever built the stage so designed; on the other hand he had undoubtedly built temporary proscenium arches for his court settings as early as 1605, and similar arches had been used in the court theatres of Italy in the sixteenth century. In any consideration of the genesis of the

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Appendix C, p. 413.

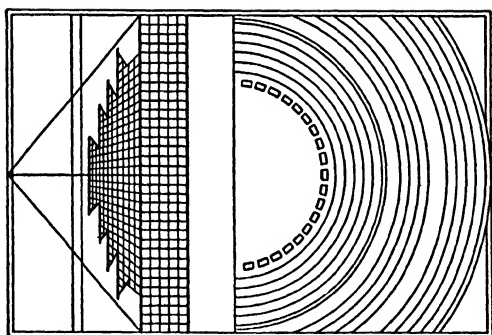
proscenium arch it must not be forgotten that the whole framework of the Roman stage, with its roof above and its side walls, was fairly suggestive of the modern proscenium or "picture frame" stage, and that the Roman theatre, unlike the Inigo Jones project, sometimes had a curtain



A



B



C



D

FIG. 22. SERLIO'S FAMOUS DRAWINGS.

From his *Architettura* (1551; English edition 1611). A shows the tragic scene, B the comic scene, and D the satyric scene. C is Serlio's plan showing the arrangement of the perspectives with a false vanishing point; the fore-stage is level, the inner stage slopes upward toward the vanishing point.

at the line of this framework. The first Italian theatre known to have had a regular modern proscenium arch and curtain was the one at Parma (B, Fig. 21), built between 1618 and 1628.

It was in connection with the development of perspective in stage setting that the first attempts were made to provide complete representative illusion as a background for acting. It is noteworthy that such attempts were made in relation to opera and masque rather than to the drama



proper. Within the limits of formal perspective a high degree of realism was reached in sixteenth-century Italy, and the idea prevailed that whatever lay within the proscenium frame should be as consistent and as convincing as possible. The mechanical equipment of the Renaissance theatre was far from crude, judged even by modern standards, for expense was no consideration to the Italian princes of that period. Candles and lamps supplied the lighting, but they were skillfully used, and in large numbers. Sabbatini, writing in 1638, describes methods of placing them to light the houses and streets of the perspective, and of using them as footlights behind a low parapet at the front of the stage. He also describes colored lighting effects obtained by placing lamps with reflectors behind glass bottles filled with wine or other colored liquids. He illustrates a method of dimming candle lights by means of cylindrical covers suspended on cords and pulleys. He mentions cranes or machines for enabling characters to fly, and methods of simulating the billows of the ocean by agitating green cloths—a device that was still popular when James O'Neill (father of Eugene O'Neill) swam through it in *The Count of Monte Cristo*. There were provisions for changing scenes quickly, and several methods are described by Sabbatini; but the one that came finally to prevail in the eighteenth century—that of wing flats sliding in grooves—appears to have been the invention of the Englishman, Inigo Jones.

#### THE ELIZABETHAN THEATRE

The Elizabethan public playhouse, built in imitation of an English inn yard, has been so frequently pictured and discussed that its probable features are familiar to every casual reader. Primarily it was an open courtyard surrounded by galleries for the spectators, and the stage was a bare platform occupying one end of the yard. A curtained inner stage, two or more proscenium doors leading to the "tiring room," and a balcony above the inner stage which might on occasion be used "for Juliet" were the essential stage equipment. The importance of this type of theatre in determining the form of the drama cannot be denied; but its importance in relation to the history of theatre architecture has been somewhat exaggerated, while that of the so-called "private" or aristocratic theatre has been overlooked. It was in the temporary court theatres and university theatres that Inigo Jones did most of his experiment-

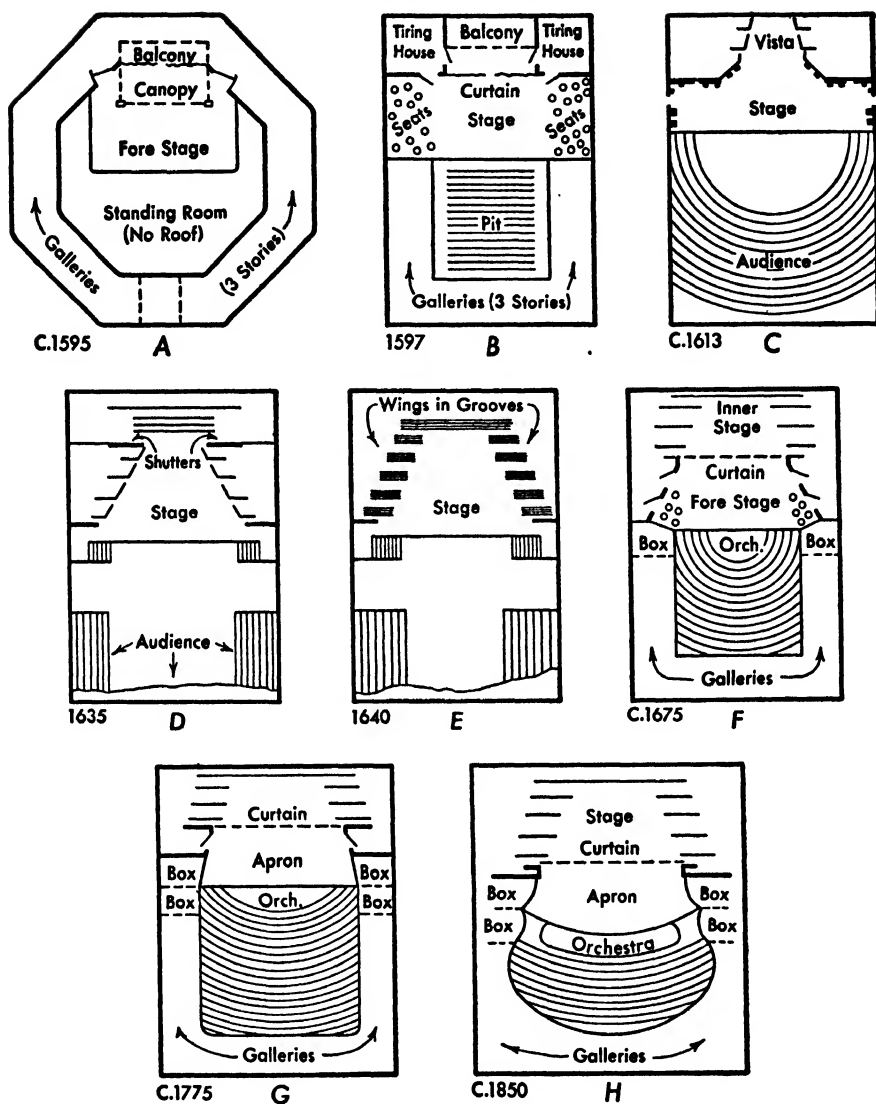


FIG. 23. EVOLUTION OF THE ENGLISH THEATRE.

A shows a typical plan of an outdoor public theatre during the reign of Elizabeth. B is a plan of the Blackfriars Theatre after the description by Professor C. W. Wallace. C is a plan of Inigo Jones's project. D shows the type of setting Jones was using on ballroom stages up to 1635, and E the radical change he made about 1640, introducing sliding wing-flats. F is a typical Restoration theatre plan; G a typical theatre plan of Garrick's time, and H the nineteenth-century theatre plan which developed from it.

ing, but it was in the private theatres that the results of these experiments were worked out into a tradition sufficiently permanent to carry beyond the Restoration.

Of the private theatres—which were not private at all, but merely aristocratically high-priced—the most important was the Blackfriars of 1597, the direct ancestor of all modern English and American theatres. It was an indoor theatre, located in the priory building of the dispossessed Franciscan friars, parts of which had already been occupied by the Office of the Revels. From 1597 to 1603 it was operated under the patronage of Queen Elizabeth with a company of boy actors from the Queen's Chapel. On the accession of James I the Children of the Chapel, as they were called, lost the royal patronage, and in 1608 they were driven from the theatre by royal edict. The theatre was then taken over by Burbage and Shakespeare, the former being already the owner of the property, and for several years the most popular and most important of the professional men's companies gave its regular performances there. This means, of course, that some of Shakespeare's last and greatest plays had their first production in an indoor, artificially lighted, aristocratic theatre, a fact sometimes lost sight of by enthusiastic devotees of the Globe Theatre tradition.

The Blackfriars Theatre was of stone construction, rectangular in shape, 66 feet long and 46 feet wide. The stage was perhaps 25 feet deep and 46 feet wide, occupying the whole width of the room (*B*, Fig. 23). There were tiring rooms behind the stage, proscenium doors, a balcony above the stage, and "traverses" or curtains, presumably concealing a small inner stage. There were galleries for the spectators as in the public theatres, but these ended where the stage began, so that the entire audience, with the exception of the privileged persons who sat on the stage itself, faced the stage from the front, and not from three sides. The custom of sitting on the stage began in the court theatres, but was first popularized at the Blackfriars. It was later copied at other private theatres, and was carried over into the Restoration period; but it was not permitted in the public open-air theatres in Elizabeth's time, and perhaps not even later.

Performances at the Blackfriars, both before and after 1608, were given with more attention to decoration and stage equipment than in the

cheaper public theatres. They were not, of course, as elaborate as those at court, but some of the devices of the court theatre were undoubtedly used, including "pieces of perspective." Whether these were set up on the outer stage, or only within the recess or inner stage behind the curtains, is a question that has not yet been settled. There are indications that footlights were used at the Blackfriars, and they were certainly used in some private theatres before the Restoration. The chief source of light was doubtless the overhead chandelier. Elaborate stage properties were used; the costumes were finer than in the public theatres; and the audiences seem to have been more genuinely appreciative. It is recorded definitely that they were more orderly—this in spite of the gallants on the stage. Altogether it seems reasonable to believe that something more like the atmosphere of the modern theatre existed at the Blackfriars than in any previous theatre or any other theatre of the time; more, in fact, than in the later English theatre until the time of Garrick.

What the Blackfriars Theatre was to modern theatre architecture, Inigo Jones was to modern scenic art. It was he who introduced to England, and so to America, the perspective setting, and with it the idea of representative illusion. At first he set up his perspectives in the Italian manner, each unit representing the corner of a building and being much too substantial for quick changing. He made one experiment with *periaktoi* at Oxford University in 1605, but in most of his settings up to 1635 he allowed the side wings to stand, and made changes during the performance only at the back center of the stage, where the elaborate properties of the masques were set up. To conceal such changes he employed shutters, sliding in grooves (*D*, Fig. 23), and it may have been these shutters that led him to the idea of using wing flats and grooves for the whole stage setting. About 1640 he began setting up his wing flats in sets of four (*E*, Fig. 23), each flat running in a groove, so that on a given signal all the flats of the first setting could be pulled back simultaneously, revealing the second setting, and so on until all four settings had been shown. This method had such obvious advantages in ease of handling as well as in rapidity of change that it came into general use in the public theatres after the Restoration, for both indoor and outdoor scenes; and—with minor variations—it remained the standard method until the realistic box setting displaced it in the nineteenth century.

## THE THEATRE AFTER THE RESTORATION

The first performances after the Restoration were given in hastily constructed, or reconstructed, theatres, of which no clear descriptions remain. These soon proved inadequate, and between 1670 and 1675 several new theatres were built, including the famous Drury Lane Theatre designed by Christopher Wren. Through the next hundred years these underwent numerous alterations, and most of the authentic sketches of them represent later steps in their evolution. It is unmistakable, however, that the foundation of all seventeenth- and eighteenth-century theatre architecture in England was the Elizabethan private theatre of the Blackfriars type. The influence of the Italian opera house and court theatre is equally unmistakable, but the greater part of that influence had already been felt before the Commonwealth, and what took place after the Restoration was rather a logical working out of forces already in operation than an introduction of new forces. If there was any new influence in the theatre it was the licentiousness of the age, but this had more effect on the drama itself than on scenic art.

The Restoration theatre retained the seating galleries of the Blackfriars type of theatre, but these soon began to encroach upon the stage in the form of proscenium boxes. The custom of sitting on the stage persisted even after this change had made it more of a nuisance. The double stage of the Blackfriars, with the traverse concealing the inner stage, survived in the Restoration theatres, but the traverse soon became a full-width curtain, the inner stage was enlarged to make room for more pretentious wing-and-drop settings, the outer stage became a simple fore-stage, and finally a mere apron. The proscenium arch of the court theatre was elaborated into a permanent gilded picture frame as early as 1671 in the Dorset Garden Theatre, although the Drury Lane Theatre of 1674 had merely a very simple hanging to mark the proscenium line. The proscenium doors of the Elizabethan theatre existed for a long time after the Restoration in the form of side doors between the stage boxes and the proscenium frame, two on each side at first, and later one on each side; but in the nineteenth century they gradually disappeared, the apron shrank, and the action of the play retired behind the curtain line.

As for the scenery proper, the methods of the court masque and the Italian opera became, after the Restoration, the regular practice of the

public theatre, but with more economy and less elaboration. From the days of Charles II to the days of Victoria, background was considered of very little importance, and it was not until late in the nineteenth century that any consistent attempt was made to outdo the exploits of Inigo Jones.

Such, in very sketchy outline, is the history of the theatre up to the coming of brighter lights and greater realism in modern times. It will be useful to us only if we can discern in it some permanence and logic of motive that will help us to evaluate the various reforms of the past and the proposed reforms of the future.

There are three essential parts of the theatre: the playing space, the place for the audience, and the scenic background. Let us briefly recapitulate the logical steps in the evolution of each. The playing space undoubtedly came first.

#### THE EVOLUTION OF THE PLAYING SPACE

For the arrangement of the playing space visibility was of course a very early motive; but I do not think it was the first. Ritual preceded spectacle in the primitive history of the drama, and the impulse that made primitive man scratch a rude circle on the ground to define the limits of the ceremony preceded even his consciousness of observation. That circle was a magic circle. Within it was the ritual of religion; without was the commonplace world.

The impulse thus to separate the drama from the reality surrounding it, and incidentally from the observer, grew and manifested itself in different ways. The Greek later emphasized his *orchestra* with a stone curb or coping. The Roman put his actors on a raised stage—partly, of course, for better visibility, but partly to make them less commonplace. Statues are placed on pedestals for a similar reason, and pictures in panels or frames; and the Romans were great enthusiasts for pedestals and panels. It seems, therefore, that the sense of detachment common in the modern theatre is not so new after all; that it had its parallel even before the dawn of art in the unreality of religious ritual, the spell of the magic circle, and that it existed in the formal, non-illusory theatres of Greece and Rome. In course of time the relative positions of actor and audience have been frequently altered, as have the conventions of acting, but the feeling that the actor should be *set apart* in some way from the audience is the oldest and most basic tradition of the playing space. Every

attempt to break it down by mingling actors and audience—from the wretched intrusions of stage-seated dandies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the false “intimacy” of some modern productions—has given offense to people of true artistic sensibility. Every such attempt will continue to give offense—at least as soon as the novelty has worn off—because it is a fundamental attack on the magic of the theatre.

Separation from the audience, then, is the first consideration in determining the arrangement of the playing space. Visibility is probably the second, and audibility the third. All three of these motives affect primarily the relation of playing space to seating space. The size and shape of the playing space are determined naturally by the requirements of the production, by the space available, by the methods of construction, by the customs of the time, and to some extent by pure accident. The Greek playing space was a circle because the chorus danced about an altar. The Roman was a platform for reasons already set down, and it was rectangular because platform stages are naturally constructed in that shape. The Elizabethan playing space was suitable for its purpose, but its form was determined partly by the accidental influence of the inn yard. The curtained inner stage developed because it was needed for interior scenes requiring stage properties which could not have been set up on the forestage without interrupting the continuity of the action. The inner stage expanded in size after the Restoration because the wing-and-drop settings required more room. In the nineteenth century the apron gradually became shallower because a growing sense of consistency and a growing feeling for æsthetic distance required that the actor should stay in the picture and not get too far away from his background. Theatre construction is too expensive to permit of a change in the playing space every time the producer wants to experiment, but whenever the drama changes in such a way as to create a continuing need the playing space sooner or later changes to satisfy that need. Doubtless it will change many more times in the future; but no change that runs counter to the basic motives of detachment, visibility, or audibility is likely to be permanent.

#### THE EVOLUTION OF THE SEATING SPACE

There is no great mystery about the place for the audience. It began as a mere location where people might stand about and watch what was

going on in the playing space; and its development has been guided by three main motives: visibility, audibility, and comfort.

When a few people stand about a circle on level ground they can see well enough, but when the numbers grow, some find their view obstructed. To solve this problem the Greeks built their *theatron* in the hollow of a hill, and by making it surround the *orchestra* on three-fourths of its circumference they enabled an amazingly large number of people to see and also to hear. The strolling players of Rome and elsewhere, having to play in open squares with no provision for seating their audiences, achieved visibility by raising the playing space. When the Romans imitated the Greek theatre and modified it by adding a stage, they cut the seating space to a semi-circle because the actor was no longer in the center of the audience, but in front. The Elizabethans found their problem of visibility and audibility already solved for them in the inn yards with surrounding galleries. Most, though not all, of the major changes in the shape of the seating space have thus been dictated by some real or fancied gain in visibility or audibility; and when visibility or audibility has been bad it has usually been because of the failure of the architect to accommodate the auditorium to altered conditions on the stage.

The third motive, comfort, brought the theatre indoors—and will continue to keep it there in most parts of the world, in spite of the fresh-air enthusiasts. The outdoor theatre served well enough in Greece for one or two annual festivals at a season when the weather could be depended upon. In Rome, with more frequent performances, sometimes in stifling hot or very stormy weather, it did not serve so well; hence the awnings, and eventually the roofs. In England the open inn yard served well enough for the "groundlings" and the vagabond players, so long as the gentlemen in the galleries were sheltered from the sun and rain; but it would not do for the court and aristocratic theatres, and in the more comfort-loving times after the Restoration it would not do for the public theatres. Outdoor performances have their charm, and will always be popular in favorable climates; but in most regions—including England and the eastern United States—they are too dependent upon the unpredictable weather to be regularly satisfactory.

In addition to the three main motives, one or two others have occasionally affected the arrangement of the seating space. The love of display which led Elizabethan and Restoration dandies to demand seats



on the stage is doubtless responsible for the proscenium boxes of the nineteenth-century theatre and the private stalls of the opera house. The cupidity of managers has undoubtedly led to occasional overcrowding and other abuses; and the stupidity of architects—if that can be called a motive—has made some theatres places of torment rather than of entertainment. But these matters have little to do with scenic art.

### THE EVOLUTION OF THE SCENIC BACKGROUND

In the genesis of scenic background five main motives are discernible. In chronological, and perhaps logical, order they are: concealment, decoration, suggestion of mood, suggestion of place, and portrayal of place.

The origin of the background is that of the Greek *skene*, or of the backing curtain of the primitive platform stage: a shelter or retiring place for the actor, to conceal him from the audience during changes of costume or intervals in the action of the play. The word *skene* itself—from which we get our word scene—means “hut” or “shelter.” A great deal of nonsense about scenic art would be avoided if we could remember that the most fundamental purpose of scenery is, and always has been, to conceal from the audience what would prove irrelevant or distracting if seen. All other purposes are incidental, and of later growth.

The second purpose, decoration, is, however, very old. Background cannot be used at all without being observed by the audience, and what must be seen may as well be beautiful. The Greeks soon found this out, and began to decorate the scene building as they decorated all their architecture; unlike the Romans, however, they seem to have had the restraint to avoid overdecoration. A background that distracts attention from the play by its excessive beauty violates the first principle of good design; nevertheless, a fairly pleasing background is generally less distracting than one that is noticeably ugly, since it does less violence to the æsthetic attitude. Decorative background, properly subordinated to the action, is therefore generally preferable to representative background which by its tawdriness offends and distracts. It is in keeping with the magic and glamour of the theatre.

The third purpose, suggestion of mood, is often confused, under the general idea of symbolism, with suggestion of place. It is probably much older, and more fundamental. Before background had been in use very long the ancients must have discovered that an appropriate decoration,

in keeping with the mood or atmosphere, heightened the dramatic effect. There is little need for suggestion of place in religious ritual, or in the early forms of drama dealing with religious and national themes already well known to the audience. But emotional symbolism of some sort is a natural part of religious ritual, and in that sense must have antedated the scene building itself. It was probably suggestion of mood rather than suggestion of place that led the Greeks to differentiate the tragic, comic, and satyric scenes; and the remarks of Vitruvius indicate that even in Roman times changes of background were dictated rather by the requirements of mood than by the logic of place.

Just when the fourth motive, suggestion of place, began to affect the scenic background is not clear; but it is obviously less basic than the three already mentioned. The ancient drama required little suggestion of place, and that little was accomplished by the use of properties, by the explanatory remarks of the chorus, and by such conventions as the use of the central door to indicate a palace, of the adjacent doors to indicate guest chambers, and of the two side approaches to indicate the city and country respectively. The Elizabethans, except when influenced by the Italian court theatre, contrived to suggest place through the words of the characters or prologue, through the posting of placards, and through the use of symbolic stage properties. Every student of Shakespeare is familiar with his remarkable skill in establishing time and place by the first few words of each scene. The more concretely the drama concerns itself with life, and the farther it gets from the familiar themes of race or religion, the greater the need for suggestion of place as an aid to understanding. Suggestion of place must not be ruthlessly condemned; without it some of the best drama we have would be unintelligible. But a great deal can be suggested without being portrayed, and a great deal can be suggested—or even portrayed—in the acting and the properties without change of scenic background.

Of the five motives affecting the background, the last, and least basic, is portrayal of place. Between suggestion and portrayal no absolute line can, of course, be drawn; the one thing develops into the other very gradually. The first attempts at a complete portrayal of place through representative illusion in the background appear to have been those of the Italian Renaissance; and it is noteworthy that they originated in a mistake—the misunderstanding by Serlio of the famous passage from

Vitruvius. It was this misunderstanding that led to the spectacular illusions of the English court theatre, and eventually brought the painted canvas wing-and-drop setting into the public theatre. But the impulse to portray background realistically did not flourish in the public theatres—except in grand opera—until the nineteenth century. Through the Restoration and the eighteenth century the emphasis was on the actor; and the background, though casually representative and fashioned, for convenience, after the court setting, made no serious attempt at illusion. The wing flats were conventional; furniture was painted on the back drop; the inner stage was poorly lighted; and settings were used over again for widely different plays. It was not until the brighter lights and the shrunken apron of the nineteenth century made the scenery more conspicuous that the motive of portrayal began again to dominate the scenic artist, and not until the coming of Belasco that it reached its height.

The ignorance of theatre-goers on such matters of theatre history is really quite amazing. When Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* was first produced it was hailed by the public, and even by the critics, as a world-shattering novelty. Here was a play done in a childlike, "let's pretend" manner, with no curtain or scenery, and only the simplest properties—a marvel of originality! Why had nobody been clever enough to think of it before? The fact that theatres all over the world—in Greece, Rome, China, Japan, Elizabethan England—had been doing it that way for three thousand years, while Broadway and its provinces had been doing it their way for barely fifty, never seemed to occur to anybody.

#### THE EVOLUTION OF STAGE PROPERTIES

Although stage properties have often associated themselves with scenery, and in the modern theatre are virtually a part of it, they appear to have had a different origin, and their development has been influenced by different motives. The stage property doubtless evolved from the hand property, and the fundamental motive of the latter was illustration or symbolism. The first hand properties were doubtless the weapons and totems carried by warriors and medicine men in tribal dances, and their use was to illustrate action or to symbolize magic. The first stage property was probably the altar. All of these things antedated the beginning of actual drama; but when the drama evolved from ritual the

symbols of ritual became the symbols of pantomime. Scenery is background, but properties are those objects needed and used by the actors to explain or illustrate their actions in some way. It is but an accident that some of them are light enough to be carried by the actors, while others—chairs, tables, beds, altars, rocks, trees, boats—are large enough and heavy enough to seem like part of the setting.

The actor antedated the scenery, and, except in an occasional perversion, has always been far more important in the eyes of the audience. For that reason the properties used by him to illustrate or symbolize his actions have always commanded more interest than the scenery; they are not of the background but of the foreground—of the very essence of the action. Naturally, therefore, they have developed more rapidly, and have lent themselves more readily to the purpose of realism.

Symbolism and illustration are closely associated, and it is not always easy to distinguish them; nor is it safe to say which came first historically. Of the two, symbolism seems the more essentially dramatic, and therefore more fundamental. Symbolism is suggestion through the display of a concrete image, conventionally accepted as standing for something else. Illustration is pictorial exposition. Illustrative stage properties are those which, like gesture, help to clarify the thought and enable the audience to understand otherwise unintelligible actions. There are, after all, very few situations in which properties are absolutely essential for explanatory purposes, gesture alone being usually sufficient, as when a Chinese actor steps through an imaginary door, or mounts an imaginary horse; and how far we choose to employ explanatory properties is largely a matter of taste. For symbolism, however, they have a distinct dramatic value; the Chinese actor, for example, uses a conventionalized horsewhip as a symbol of his equestrian status, or a pair of yellow flags with wheels painted on them to symbolize a chariot. (See Plate 17.) Visible symbols often stir the imagination as mere words do not—witness the effect of a flag, a mace, an altar, a crucifix, or a statue of the Virgin.

With properties, as with acting, therefore, effective symbolism has always been a sounder motive than realism, though a certain measure of realism may be necessary for intelligibility. Excessive realism in the choice of properties involves the same dangers as excessive realism in the acting; but it does not involve the distraction incident to excessive realism of background.

## THE EVOLUTION OF STAGE LIGHTING

The Greek theatre was lighted by the sun and the Elizabethan public theatre by the misty gray of a London afternoon. But those who on that account insist that daylight is the only truly theatrical light, and the outdoor theatre the only true theatre, are jumping to false conclusions. Daylight is *less* theatrical than artificial light, for the obvious reason that it is more natural, more commonplace, and therefore less magic. Primitive tribes have sometimes felt this, and have often—if not usually—conducted their ceremonial dances in the mystic glow of the campfire. Demons and spirits, and even gods, may be more readily imagined in artificial light than in the disillusioning light of day—which may be one reason why we put stained glass windows in our churches, and candles on the altar, and why our Boy Scouts save their ghost stories for the campfire at night instead of telling them at the lunch table. Even the outdoor stage is more magically impressive at night, under the spell of one or two flood lights, than it can ever be in the daytime.

Logically, artificial light belongs to the very genesis of primitive drama. The daylight of the Greek theatres was a matter of expediency; the Greeks had no adequate method of lighting their huge theatres, or of lighting the streets; and it probably never occurred to them to hold their public assemblies at night. For similar reasons the strolling players of the Middle Ages performed by daylight, as did their descendants, the vagabond Elizabethans in the inn yards. But whenever, in the history of the theatre, artificial light has been practicable, it has generally proved to be more dramatically effective than daylight.

From the very first, artificial light in the theatre has been *frankly* artificial. It is not basically an imitation of daylight; it is an escape from daylight. There are those who complain of the footlights on the ground that they are not natural, since they shine up instead of down, and distort the actor's face with false shadows. Of course they are not natural. They were invented—probably in the Italian Renaissance, but possibly earlier—for the sole purpose of emphasizing the actor and lighting up his face. There was precedent for them in the glow of the campfire on the faces of dancing savages, and there is much of the same magic in both.

The discovery that light is emotional, a great instrument of mood, is not new. It goes back, in fact, to those same ancient campfires. The

cathedral builders of the Middle Ages understood the principle; and the use of colored lights in the sixteenth century suggests that the Italian theatre artists understood it also. It fell into neglect after the Restoration—when everything else romantic fell into neglect; the artificiality persisted, but with little relation to particular mood. Since the invention of electricity, however, the emotional possibilities of light have been rediscovered and greatly widened.

#### THE EVOLUTION OF COSTUME AND MAKE-UP

Costume and make-up, like other elements of the drama, have their origin in primitive ritual, with magic symbolism as the first motive. Primitive man adorned his body, smeared his face, or donned a mask, to frighten evil spirits, impress or honor the gods, or symbolize some force or element of nature.

A second motive was disguise. The sense of magic unreality that prompted him to mark off his playing space prompted him also to conceal the identity of his performers. He early felt that the recognition of the individual actor, or dancer, as his own commonplace self destroyed the magic spell.

Symbolism and disguise are thus earlier and more fundamental motives than representation or impersonation. That is why masks have been so popular with primitive races. For symbolizing extremes of abstraction or of magic, or for disguising the individual, they are far more potent than make-up or costume. Make-up itself was conventional and grotesque long before it was realistic; it is still conventional in the classic Chinese drama.

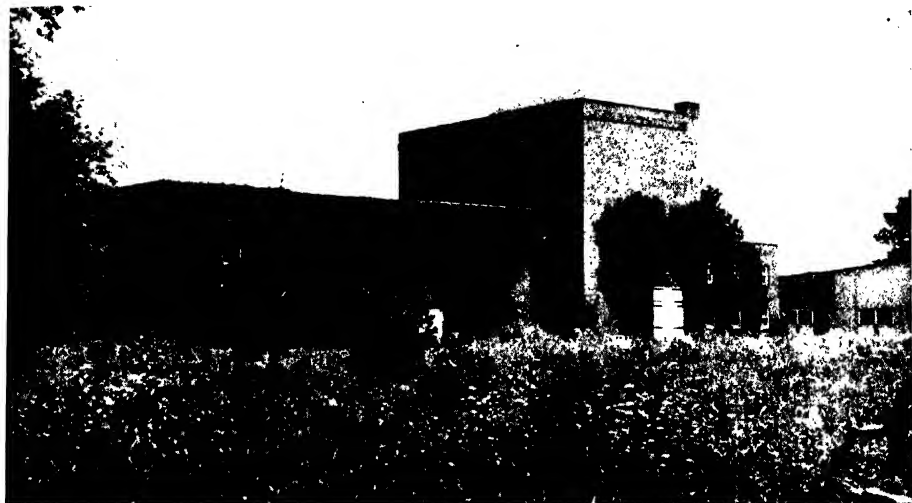
The conventional identification of characters by mask or costume is at least as old as the Greek drama, but in its early stages it is almost indistinguishable from pure symbolism. Only in comparatively recent times have costume and make-up been made realistically representative. The Elizabethan actors wore the costumes of their own time, varying them only to represent extremes of character or social position. In the eighteenth century it was not always thought necessary to do even that, and actresses representing servants often wore frocks more appropriate to ladies-in-waiting. Not until the beginning of the nineteenth century was there any serious effort to make the costumes historically authentic.

There is perhaps less objection to realism of costume and make-up

than to realism of setting because costume and make-up, like properties, have to do very directly with the actor. But it is well to remember that symbolism is more basic than representation, and that disguise is almost as basic as symbolism. This fact seems often to have been lost sight of, with consequent sacrifice of æsthetic distance. There seems to have been very little disguise of the actor in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and little more in the early nineteenth; and one must feel that the magic of the theatre suffered. Realistic representation has little to do with the magic of the theatre; but mystic symbolism and the suppression of the real and the commonplace have a great deal.

#### SUMMARY

The genesis of scenic art is, then, the genesis of the theatre itself in religious ceremonial. The theatre's hold upon our imaginations and emotions rests upon its origin in the spirit of magic; and to retain that hold it must continue to cast its spell over us in terms of the unreal, and must avoid the casual and the commonplace. Detachment, disguise, and symbolism are the most basic motives. Visual beauty is good, but secondary; suggestion of place is sometimes helpful if kept subordinate; while realistic portrayal is the latest and least basic motive. With these motives in mind let us examine the modern tendencies in scenic art, and consider which of them represent the soundest theories of play production.



*Plate 25. A Low-Cost Community Theatre. The Players Club of Swarthmore, Pa. Owned and operated entirely by amateurs. ABOVE: exterior, after fifteen years. RIGHT: Program signet. BELOW: Striking the "ship" (shown in Plate 27). LOWER RIGHT: the prompt-side corner.*



*Advocate Photos*







David Ullman

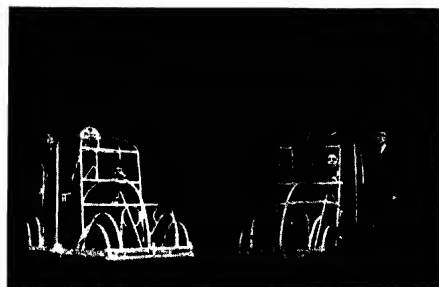
*Plate 26. Extreme Simplicity in Children's Plays. Painted screens against a black cloth cyclorama. ABOVE: Alice in Wonderland. BELOW: The Emperor's New Clothes; the same screens repainted with slight additions. Both sets designed and painted by Barbara D. Spencer for the Players Club of Swarthmore.*





David Ullman

*Plate 27. Simplicity Through Suggestive Symbolism.* Very sketchy symbols against a black cyclorama. ABOVE: Prologue of *The Week-End of a Pirate*; one painted flat, a barrel, and a few ropes (see Plate 25). BELOW: Four scenes from *Two On An Island*, using the same benches with different outline strips and beaver board facings.



David Ullman





*Plate 28. Adaptable Box Sets.* ABOVE: A stippled and sponged set, arranged for *Going Crooked*; director, Charles D. Mitchell. BELOW: A stock panelled set arranged for *Stage Door*; director, Samuel Evans, Jr. Note how the joints obtrude themselves between adjacent stippled flats, and the upper portions of the panelled flats; and how they disappear in the panelling and in the corners and angles formed by the jogs. Note also that the coarse texture of the upper set takes the lights better than the over-all stippling on the upper part of the panelled set.





*Dick Wallace*

*Plate 29. A Panelled Stock Set.* The same stock set shown in the upper picture of Plate 28, repainted in two shades of light green. Note that the joints, while visible, do not attract attention. The panelling is too contrasty to be used often without repainting, even with varied arrangements. ABOVE: *Letters to Lucerne*. BELOW: *Ring Around Elizabeth*, with several different flats, and different doors and windows.

*John F. Spencer*





A. F. Jackson

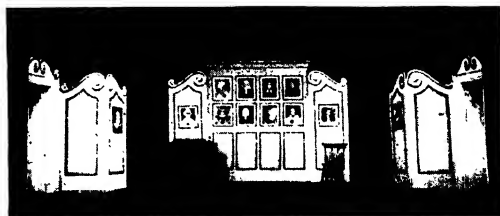
*Plate 30. A Stylized Unit Set.* Beaver-board flats in an 18th-Century motif, painted ivory and gold, and seen against a black cyclorama. Designed by the author for *The Rivals*. Nothing was changed but the center panel, the furniture, and the color symbolism; the end pieces were hinged to swing down stage for the indoor scenes. ABOVE: Final scene at King's Mead Field (green trees). BELOW: A street in Bath (green bushes); Mrs. Malaprop's lodgings (blue and gold furniture and drapes); Captain Absolute's lodgings (scarlet table cover and chair cushions); Bob Acres' lodgings (green table covers and cushions).

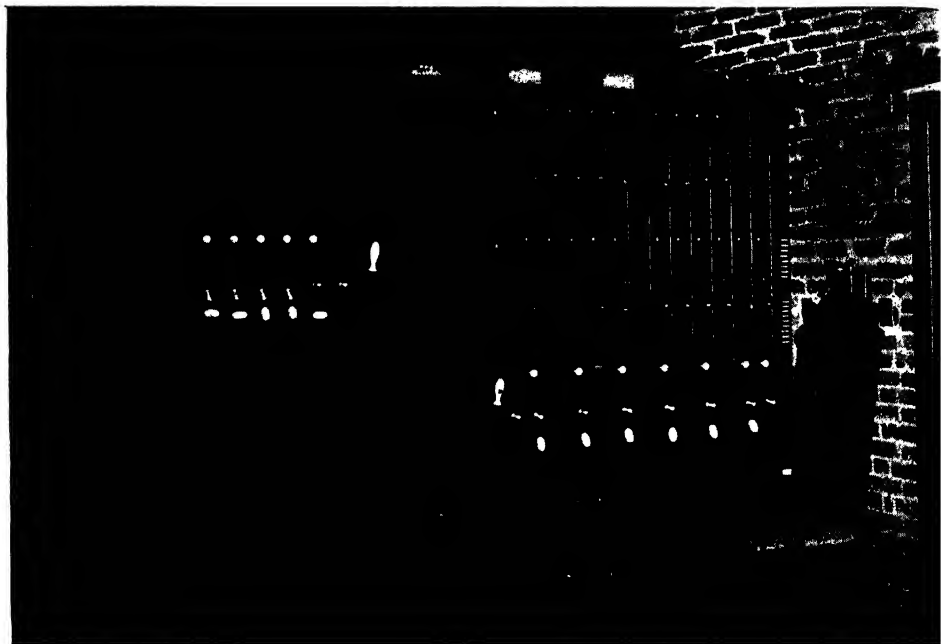




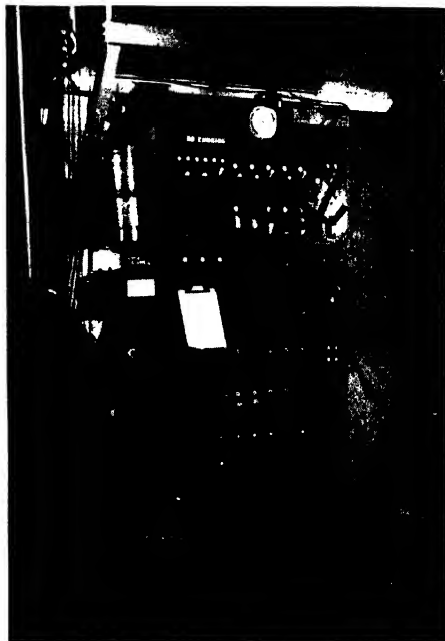
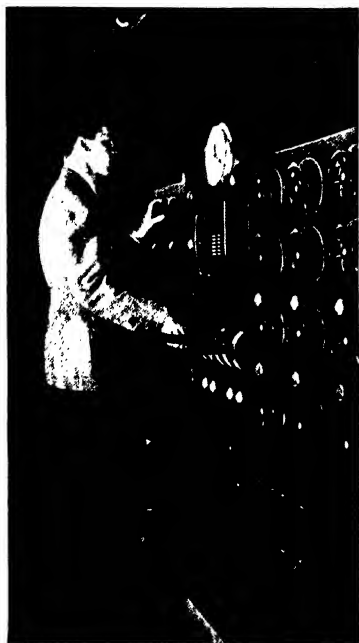
David Ullman

*Plate 31. A Formal Unit Set.* A quick-change set for *The School for Scandal*, somewhat less stylized than that for *The Rivals*. It made use of proscenium doors, behind which formal drop curtains came down for the fore-stage scenes—dark blue for Sir Peter's and gray for Charles's hallway. ABOVE: Charles's dining room. BELOW: Joseph's library. INSERTS: Lady Sneerwell's; Charles's portrait gallery.





*Plate 32. Three Types of Control Boards.* ABOVE: A remote control board with five presets, in Irvine Auditorium, University of Pennsylvania. BELOW LEFT: The board at Allegheny College, using "Variac" auto-transformers for dimming. RIGHT: A direct control board with interchangeable dimmers, in the Players Club of Swarthmore. (Note the prompter's "dolly.")



*Modern Tendencies in Scenic Art*

AS IMPLIED in the statement at the beginning of Chapter I, there is no single, well-defined tendency in modern scenic art, or in any other aspect of the theatre. There is, rather, a great seething activity in experimentation, out of which a dozen more or less distinct tendencies have so far developed, along with a tangled miscellany of influences and counter-influences too complex for analysis. Much of this activity originated in a reaction against false realism, as seen in the painted canvas settings of the last century.

Hardly anybody now defends those settings, with their flimsy doors, flapping walls, painted shades and shadows, false perspective, and hideously unconvincing wings and drops. The revolt against them had quite sufficient provocation. But it has been from the first a curiously confused revolt—a revolt against realism and against artificiality at the same time; and its supporters are still advocating all sorts of inconsistent things, on the general principle, perhaps, that any change is bound to be an improvement. They condemn quite opposite faults for similar reasons, and similar faults for opposite reasons. They denounce the attempt to make the theatre realistic, and in the same breath complain that it is tawdry and unconvincing. They ridicule the flapping canvas walls with painted panels and moldings, but deplore the attempt to build more convincing walls with real panels and moldings. They seek to abolish the footlights as unnatural, but they condemn the cult of realism founded by the late David Belasco—who was one of the first to abolish the footlights. They condemn the whole indoor theatre as hopelessly artificial, and eulogize the more natural sunlit theatre of the Greeks; but they praise the architectural background of the Greek theatre on the ground that it was non-realistic, formal, and artificial. They glorify the power of fluid theatrical light as an abstract instrument of emotion, but complain that the light used to represent daylight is not sufficiently white and



diffused to be convincing. They complain of the "picture-frame" stage as two-dimensional and unnatural, and in the same breath condemn it for its realism; and they advocate the platform stage as more frankly theatrical. In short, though they frequently display excellent taste, they mix their motives appallingly.

In their attempts to develop a satisfactory theory of scenic art the experimenters have, of course, been considerably influenced by contemporary movements in the other arts, as well as by the underlying social and educational influences of the time, including the impact of two world wars. Realism has fallen into disfavor in painting, sculpture, and music, as well as in the theatre; and various types of stylization and abstraction have been tried in all the arts—though at the same time there have been occasional exploits in excessive realism, such as the sharply detailed photography of the candid camera, or the blood-splashed horror pictures by our so-called war artists.

In the theatre the most significant anti-realistic movements have been those based upon simplification, symbolism, stylization, formalism, plasticism, expressionism, cubism, constructivism, and surrealism. These involve some overlappings and some confusion of terminology, and should not be thought of as separate and distinct movements. More accurately, they are definable motives or tendencies, sometimes operating singly, sometimes in various combinations, and sometimes at cross purposes; but broadly interpreted they cover most of the important experiments in twentieth-century scenic art. To understand them properly, however, we must first give some attention to the more recent developments in realism itself.

#### REALISM IN SCENIC ART

As already suggested, realism began very early in the occasional impulse to startle or impress, and for a long time that was its only motive. Later came the motive to suggest place; and later still the motive to portray place consistently and convincingly.

The last motive grew out of the other two and was at first largely defensive. When some elements in the theatre were made more realistic other elements were thrown into unfavorable contrast, and were criticized as unreal and unconvincing. Criticism of that sort began very early; there are hints of it, for example, in the comedies of Aristophanes. In

Elizabethan times there was much ridicule of the sketchy realism in the public theatre, especially from those who had seen the more elaborate settings of the court masque or the Italian opera. Yet the inconsistencies of the Italian perspective setting had been ridiculed almost from the time of its invention, particularly its tendency to make the actor seem to grow taller as he walked away from the audience. In the eighteenth century, with the setting far in the background and poorly lighted, the challenge was not very great; but in the nineteenth century, with the shrinkage of the apron and the improvement of stage lighting, the unconvincing character of the painted setting became more and more apparent, and the criticism more and more severe. Harassed managers called upon their stage carpenters and scene painters to meet this criticism, and the stage carpenters and scene painters did the only thing they knew how to do: they built more substantially and painted more carefully. They modified or abandoned perspective, devised the box setting to replace the wings and drops for indoor scenes, and substituted real properties for painted imitations. But still the lights grew brighter and the critics more discontented.

Then came the day of the mechanician—the stage carpenter glorified. The Continental mechanician, especially, began to substitute modern scientific efficiency for the slipshod methods of the old theatre. He developed and perfected the hydraulic elevator stage, the sliding stage, the revolving stage, the jack-knife stage, the cyclorama, the built setting, the Fortuny lighting system, and a host of lesser devices.<sup>1</sup> Although most of these have since been adapted to non-realistic purposes it must be clearly understood that they first came into common use as instruments of realism. The elevator stage was developed chiefly to facilitate the elaboration of spectacle in grand opera. The revolving stage and jack-knife stage were designed to permit the use of substantial built settings without delay in the changing of scenes. The cyclorama was a reaction against the unreality of the painted back drop and the canvas sky border. The Fortuny lighting system—by which the white light of arc lamps was indirectly reflected from silk banners against the diffusing surface of a plaster dome or cyclorama—was devised to make more convincing the

<sup>1</sup> Some of these were not, however, new inventions. The revolving stage had been used in Japan, and perhaps the Greek *eccyclema* was in effect a revolving stage. The elevator stage and numerous other devices were used in this country by Steele Mackaye in the 'nineties. Many of these things were but adaptations of the machines used in the Renaissance theatres.

representation of sky and distance in the theatre; and the abolition of footlights, though now commonly associated with the anti-realistic theatre, was actually prompted by the sudden and remarkable discovery that real sunlight shines down, not up.

All the mechanism, however, failed to satisfy the rebels; the theatre was still unreal, they said. At that point they began to disagree. Some said, "Let us abandon altogether the attempt to portray background realistically, and go back to the frank theatricality of earlier times." Others said, "If the stage is too artificial let us spare no pains to make it more real." Thus realism and anti-realism became divergent tendencies in the theatre, both designed to correct the same fault.

The modern realist is generally much more clearheaded and consistent than the anti-realist. The latter is still an experimenter, jumping uncertainly from one new method to another. The realist knows what he wants. According to his view the purpose of the drama is to "hold the mirror up to nature"—to picture life as it is, or as we see it; and the purpose of the setting is to picture the background. He has no patience with halfheartedness, and if the setting is to represent a room he wants it to look like a room. He hates the obviously painted imitation of a room, and he will go to any length in solidity of construction and in detail of furnishing to make the room seem real. If he is a practical man of the theatre he knows that some deception is possible, and even necessary; that things can be made to seem real which are not real. But representative illusion, consistent and complete, is always his objective.

It will not do to condemn offhand what is after all a natural growth and the accepted mode of the commercial theatre—to say nothing of the moving pictures. Let us rather consider its merits and demerits in terms of what we have seen to be the basic motives of the theatre.

The charges against realism are many, but the three most important are that it distracts attention from the actor, weakens illusion by challenging comparison, and tends to destroy æsthetic distance.

The first charge applies to realism of background rather than of properties or action, and is most serious when the background is not only realistic but elaborate. There is no essential distraction in reality as such; if there were we should never be able to avoid distraction in real life, or to concentrate on important things. It is when the reality of the background becomes insistent or obtrusive that it distracts attention. Too

much detail, where detail is unnecessary or unexpected, is distracting. Unduly conspicuous or striking elements in the background are distracting. Successful imitation of reality when such imitation is seen to be difficult or remarkable is distracting. The very effort to startle or impress out of which realism originally grew had in it the potential sources of distraction, and the most distracting form of realism today is that which is clearly intended to evoke admiration or applause for its cleverness, or completeness, or deceptiveness.

The second charge—that realism weakens illusion by challenging comparison—applies to realism both of background and of properties, though it is more serious in respect to the former. The fault arises in the failure to distinguish between the illusion of imagination and the illusion of deception. In the attempt to stimulate the imagination by suggesting place the producer is safe so long as the elements of reality are acceptable symbolically, without hint of deception. But the moment they become so numerous or so unnecessarily real as to imply deception, a vicious circle is set up; each element of unreality arouses unfavorable comparison and provokes further effort at realism; and each gain in realism raises the standard of comparison, so that deception becomes more difficult. Since no imitation of life can quite equal reality the whole process becomes futile, and results only in dissatisfaction.

The chief objection to the extreme realism of a *Street Scene* or a *Dead End* is that you do not expect to see anything so expensively and massively complete as a row of three-story houses or a river-front dock in the theatre. First you are startled and amazed. Then you begin looking for flaws and are able to find none; the stone looks like stone, the brick like brick; the windows work; the pilings seem to be real. You look harder, and discover that there are black curtains to mask the exits; that the third-story windows are fakes; that the concrete curbstone has a grain in it and is really painted wood. "Aha!" you say, "they can't fool me!" The fact is that the theatre can never fool us, in that sense, and should never try. That sort of realism should be left to the films.

In the films representative realism is generally taken for granted. People know that expense is no consideration, that there are no limitations of space, that the camera can be moved, if necessary, to take shots "on location," and that the scenes can be shot in any convenient order with no regard to time, or to rapidity in shifting scenes; they have seen

the Palace of Versailles or the Senate chamber at Washington so perfectly reproduced in a Hollywood studio as to be indistinguishable—photographically—from the real thing. Naturally they have come to expect perfection, and have ceased to marvel at it, or to be challenged or distracted by it, as they are and always will be in the theatre.

Among the elements of attempted deception that have proved themselves most disturbing in the theatre are: false perspective; false shades and shadows, especially painted ones; flat, painted representations of three-dimensional objects—not when they are frankly suggestive, or decorative, but only when they attempt to be realistic; accurate but lifeless imitations of trees, bushes, or animals; representations of boats, ships, railroad trains, and the like, especially in motion; direct representations of the sun, moon, or stars; realistic, rather than symbolic, sunrise and sunset effects; representations of floods, tornadoes, and forest fires; and picturizations of real places, so well known to the audience that comparison is inevitable.

The third charge—that realism endangers æsthetic distance—applies even more to the acting than to the setting, but in some degree to both. When any phase of a performance so arouses the spectator's sense of reality that he feels himself involved in its implications or is too vividly reminded of his own personal experience, he loses his sense of detachment, and his æsthetic attitude is destroyed.

Against these charges the realists have offered several pleas in their own defense. In the first place they point out that we have long been committed to the idea of scenic representation of place and that it is better to have it truly and effectively realistic than halfheartedly so. They say that to abandon realism altogether would be to discard many excellent and enjoyable plays that have been written for realistic production and could not be given intelligibly in the Greek, or Elizabethan, or Chinese manner. They insist that unreality is often more distracting and disturbing than reality; and they claim that perfect realism, properly subordinated, is actually less obtrusive than expressionism or stylization, because it is more like the life we are accustomed to.

There is considerable justice in these pleas—particularly the last. If realistic methods in scenic art had always been confined to realistic plays, and had always been convincing rather than unconvincing, we should have heard less of anti-realism. We hear relatively little objection now

to the realism of the moving pictures because the accuracy of the camera disarms, to a certain extent, the critical attitude. But we do hear violent objection on those infrequent occasions when a moving-picture audience discovers that something supposedly real has been faked. On the whole it seems clear that the distraction lies more in some recognition of futility or inconsistency than in realistic accuracy *per se*.

One reason why the films can be more realistic than the stage without loss of æsthetic distance is that nobody ever quite forgets that he is looking at a picture—a very real picture perhaps, but a picture of reality rather than reality itself. In the theatre the eyes focus on living actors against their background; on the screen it is the camera that does the focusing. Psychologically that is a tremendously important difference, and explains why the æsthetic attitude is so much more critical and difficult to balance in the theatre.

The great evils in realism on the stage are, it seems to me, the constant effort to achieve completeness without regard to relevancy—which is bad design in any art—and the effort to achieve realistic effects that are not honestly and reasonably within the capabilities of stage equipment. If we examine the objections to realism we find that most of them are based on one or the other of these faults. Yet neither fault is essentially a part of realism; with a realistic play and adequate equipment, a truly artistic director can go pretty far in the representation of reality without committing either.

#### SIMPLIFIED REALISM

One objection to detailed completeness in realism is that it is unnecessary; and therein lies the key to the best type of simplified realism.

It is very significant that detailed completeness played no part in the early history of realism, but developed later as a defensive measure, and then only by confusion with consistency. The defensive attitude of the realist is understandable: he simply tries to correct the faults that have accidentally arisen. When something is obtrusively inconsistent and unconvincing he tries to make it consistent and convincing. If the inconsistency is associated with incompleteness he tries to achieve consistency through completeness; and after a while he acquires the habit. The habit is bad; but the underlying impulse is good.

Some of the greatest artists have understood that it is possible to apply

realism in a limited way, especially in the foreground, without indulging in orgies of representative elaboration. What may be called simplified realism consists in the avoidance of unreality where unreality might be distracting, or misleading, or destructive of illusion; but it achieves that avoidance through the elimination of unconvincing details rather than the addition of convincing ones.

In the balcony scene of *Romeo and Juliet* there are good reasons for avoiding unreality. The necessities of the plot demand that Juliet shall appear on the balcony and be seen by Romeo, and any obvious unreality in the appearance of the balcony will at once distract attention from the characters, and perhaps raise a doubt as to Juliet's safety. On the other hand nobody cares at all whether the rest of Juliet's house and garden are realistic in detail, so long as they do not demand attention. Rollo Peters, who designed the settings for the production in which he and Jane Cowl played the title parts, handled this problem with good taste. He eliminated the usual shaky trellises and paper flowers, made the balcony severely plain and substantial-looking, and placed it, as a single pavilion, at the center of the stage. The rest of the setting consisted of soft, neutral draperies, hardly noticeable in the semi-darkness. All the light was directed at the balcony and the actors, and the attention of the audience concentrated on the action. The immediate background of the action was realistic in the best sense; while the rest of the background was not realistic at all, and did not have to be so because its unreality was never obtrusive.

The same effect is achieved whenever the whole background is a black void, or a dark set of neutral drapes, and only the foreground properties are real. Two or three characters may be seated on real chairs about a real table, with real dishes, or glasses, or tankards, and the whole group lighted by one soft-edged spotlight on a darkened stage; the result is realism without distraction, conviction without completeness—in short, simplified realism (Plates 5, 14).

When the mood of a play does not permit such intense concentration of light in darkness, it is still possible to use neutral draperies, or simple combinations of draperies with screens, arches, and the like as an unobtrusive background for realistic foreground properties in interior sets; or to combine draperies with wood-wings, borders, and sky drop in exteriors. The very illogicality of the latter arrangement disarms the

critical attitude; and if the director is successful in concentrating attention on the actors and the significant properties, the foreground effect can be essentially realistic despite the simplification of detail and the subordination of background. This is what the illustrator does when he draws his main characters with accuracy and realism, but leaves out the background altogether, or hints at it with a few sketchy lines (Plate 20).

Simplified realism lends itself to a wider variety of uses than almost any other method in scenic art and combines well with other methods. It is not always easily distinguishable from others, and some of the settings properly classed as essentially realistic are loosely spoken of as decorative, or formal, or symbolic. At times simplified realism comes very close to symbolism; indeed its chief function is to suggest a place or mood at a moment when too much abstraction or stylization would falsify the place or shatter the mood.

#### SYMBOLISM

Symbolism is not generally recognized as a separate style or movement in scenic art, but it is certainly distinguishable as a motive; and as a motive it plays an important part in the general effort to get away from photographic realism.

A symbol is something that stands for something else, not representatively, but conventionally—that is, by common understanding and agreement. Most of our communication is carried on by means of symbols, including our written or printed words, and even our commonest gestures. Many symbols—like the characters in Chinese writing—originate in pictorial representation, but later become so far conventionalized that there is no suggestion of realism about them, and their meaning depends upon recognized association. What I have called simplified realism suggests a great deal of reality by selecting a little; true symbolism goes a step farther and substitutes a pure convention.

There is a power in symbolism that is very close to the magic of the theatre, or of religion. The churches make frequent use of it. An image of Christ or the Virgin Mary is very different in function from a statue of Washington or Napoleon. Neither, of course, is intended to deceive—to be mistaken in any actual sense for the reality. But the historical statue is primarily a picture or memorial, while the religious one is a symbol intended to suggest a spiritual presence. This sort of



symbolism is at once more real, and less real, than realism; and it is far more emotional.

In the theatre symbolism has been more generally and effectively applied to the properties than to the scenic background. In the Chinese theatre, for example, a stick of wood with a bit of cloth attached symbolizes a baby; since the audience is familiar with the convention nobody laughs, and when the mother addresses the symbol in words of mother love, the effect is actually more emotional than if a real baby were used. When this piece of symbolism appears in the pseudo-Chinese play *The Yellow Jacket* (Plate 17-e), the American audience first laughs at the property, and then gives attention to the mother; and when, a few moments later, she kills herself for the sake of the child and ascends an absurd ladder into "heaven," the audience is profoundly moved.

In respect to the background, it may be possible under certain conditions to suggest the atmosphere of a forest better with a single tree, frankly displayed as a symbol, than with a dozen trees arranged realistically. Logically that is no more absurd than the attempt to suggest it with six printed letters on paper—F-O-R-E-S-T. It is all a question of what we are accustomed to. Elizabethan audiences accepted a tree—or even a single branch—to symbolize a forest; or they accepted a sign held up by a stage hand and bearing the words "The Forest of Arden." In spite of our devotion to realism, a modern audience can easily accept two potted evergreens and a wall as symbolizing a garden, or a single Gothic window as symbolizing a church (Fig. 32; Plates 21, 30).

That we do not hear more of symbolism as a distinct movement in scenic art is due, I think, to the fact that it combines well with other motives which are more strikingly distinct—especially with stylization and formalism.

#### STYLIZATION

Stylization, though often associated with symbolism, is somewhat different in purpose. Symbolism establishes the thought or mood; stylization establishes the *mode*.

The stylist endeavors to provide a scheme of decoration in some way characteristic of the particular author, or his theme or intent, or the period, or the nationality, or the occasion of production. Stylization is, in this sense, external to the play itself, though it should not be irrele-

vant. Sometimes it is applied in a decorative way to the background only, while the acting remains realistic; sometimes the costumes, make-ups, and properties are stylized also, and sometimes even the acting. Usually the style is constant for the whole play, though the scene may change several times; and here again stylization differs from symbolism, which is concerned with each mood as it arises, and so may employ a different symbol in each scene.

One of the earliest of the modern stylized settings—and one of the best—was that designed by Robert Edmond Jones for *The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife*. Another early example was the series of settings for *The Blue Bird* at the Moscow Art Theatre, done in a children's storybook style. Most of the settings used in the *Chauve Souris* were stylized, though not all of them were in the same style. Several of them—those for *Katinka* and the *Wooden Soldiers*, for example (Plate 9)—were stylized in the spirit of Russian toys; others in the spirit of French or Chinese porcelain, or of Leon Bakst's colorful backgrounds for the Ballet Russe. More recent examples from Broadway might include the Norman Bel Geddes *Hamlet* (which was symbolic, formal, and plastic as well), the ultra-Greek settings from *Amphytrion* 38 and *The Warrior's Husband*, the Robert Edmond Jones settings for the Paul Robeson *Othello*, the mild cartoonery of Lemuel Ayres' settings for *Oklahoma*, and the adaptations of Currier and Ives prints for *Up in Central Park*. Far more numerous, and generally more successful, are the examples from college and community theatres; a few of them are reproduced in this book, and many others may be found in the files of *Theatre Arts*, especially in the July number each year (Plates 1, 6, 13, 18, 21, 26, 30).

Stylization seems to be at its best in connection with artistic child's play. It was thoroughly delightful in the *Chauve Souris*, and lends itself admirably to the presentation of fairy tales; storybook plays like *Alice in Wonderland* or *The Emperor's New Clothes*; exotic plays like *The Yellow Jacket*, *Sakuntala*, or *The Little Clay Cart*; allegorical plays, or fables, like *The Blue Bird*; satirical plays like *Androcles and the Lion*; tongue-in-the-cheek operettas like those of Gilbert and Sullivan; archaic plays like *Fashion* or *The Beggar's Opera*; fanciful plays, humorous plays, ballets, musical comedies, and extravaganzas. It does not usually lend itself so well to seriously realistic or tragic plays.

Most stylized settings are abstractly conventional rather than realistic, though even a consistently realistic setting may establish a characteristic style or mode for a play—as did the late-Victorian period setting for *Life With Father*. In extreme stylization there is a kind of frank naïveté, not innocent, but intentional—an attitude both childlike and sophisticated at the same time. Therein lies the chief usefulness of stylization, which is the preservation of æsthetic distance, the heightening of the æsthetic attitude. Realism serves chiefly to strengthen the empathic appeal; symbolism, to reach the emotions through the imagination. Stylization serves to accentuate the unreality of the theatre and to encourage the spirit of play.

#### FORMALISM

Many anti-realists, however, are not content even with stylization, and demand the complete suppression of the stage setting as such, and the substitution of a purely formal background. The background, they feel, should be neither representative nor suggestive; it should belong to the theatre and not to the play, and should signify nothing except the essential theatricality of the playing space. Some formalists approve of a decorative element in the background, provided it is kept subordinate, but fundamentally they disapprove of any attempt to make the setting part of the play.

The chief inspiration for this movement comes, of course, from the Greek and Elizabethan theatres, and the strongest thing that can be said in its favor is that many of the world's greatest poetic dramas were written for formal stages and successfully produced on them. There is a vitality about the formal stage that is not always equaled on the representative or stylistic stage.

It should be understood, however, that when we see a Greek play performed in a modern replica of a Greek theatre the effect upon us is not that of pure formalism. An element of stylization inevitably creeps in through the fact that the theatre is not our own theatre but an exotic one appropriate to the particular play. The same thing happens when we see a Shakespearean play performed in an imitation Elizabethan theatre, or when we see *The Yellow Jacket* in a setting representing a Chinese theatre.

Pure formalism is possible only when the background is accepted by

the audience as the normal, customary one of its own familiar theatre; or when the background is so far subordinated as not to engage the attention. A formal background may be decorative in an unobtrusive way,

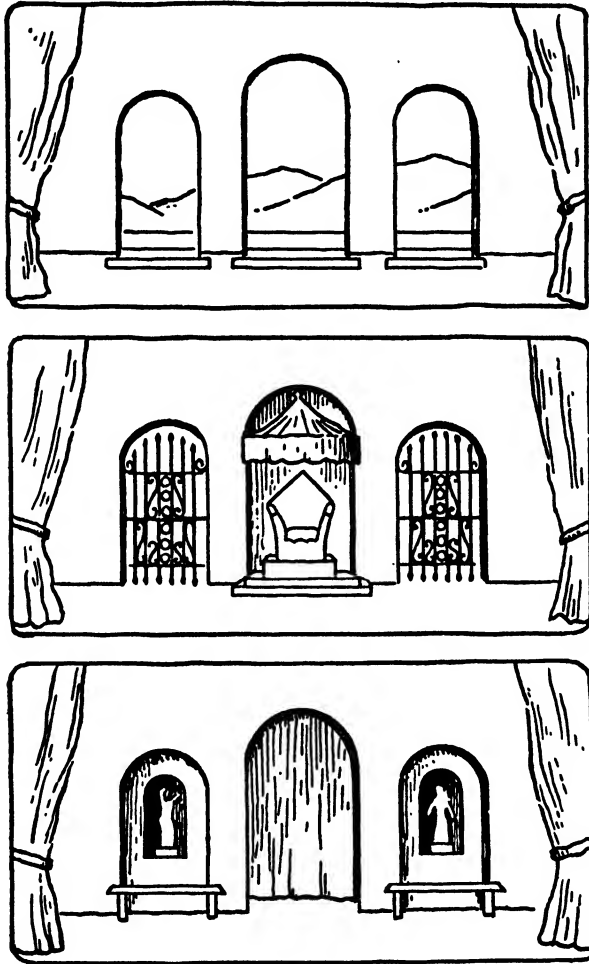


FIG. 24. A SKELETON SETTING.

as the Greek *skene* was; and a permanent stage to which a regular audience has become accustomed can carry more decoration without obtrusiveness than a stage to which the audience is not accustomed.

The bare stage of a commercial theatre, as it was shown in *Our Town*, is not an example of true formalism for the reason that we are not accustomed to seeing it, and are too well aware that it was never designed

to be seen. Its very obtrusiveness becomes an element of distraction. The same play done on a high school stage with neutral and familiar draperies would be a much better example of formalism.

Most of the attempts at formalism today are really compromises—accidental compromises with stylization like those mentioned, or intentional compromises with realism or symbolism. One of the most popular forms of compromise is that of the unit setting—especially the type often called a skeleton setting, in which a formal architectural structure occupies the major part of the stage throughout the play, while certain units, panels, or backings are changed for each act (Fig. 24). This device is not new; in effect it is that used by Inigo Jones prior to 1640, and by the Italians of the preceding century. Perhaps the Greek *periaktoi* were not essentially different in principle. Nearly all types of unit settings involve some element of formalism (Plates 1, 4, 12, 13-b, c, 30, 31).

Four types of modern stages have, it seems to me, been reasonably successful in accomplishing the true purpose of formalism. One is the outdoor stage with a backing of trees, shrubbery, clipped hedges, or non-stylistic architectural features, readily accepted by the audience as appropriate—almost inevitable—to the place. Another is the indoor stage backed by simple draperies, used consistently and with very little change for different plays, and merely designed to provide a neutral background for the action. The third is the so-called "space stage," the essential feature of which is light, so controlled as to reveal only the significant action and to suppress the background altogether in a void of darkness; the methods of the space stage are, it is true, adaptable to the purposes of expressionism, or of simplified realism, but they help to accomplish at the same time the purpose of formalism. The fourth type is the arena stage, as used in the Penthouse Theatre (Plate 3).

Formalism, like stylization, functions largely to preserve æsthetic distance. Symbolism, stylization, and formalism all tend to perpetuate the essential magic of the theatre, the first two by aiding the actor, the last by keeping out of his way and putting him squarely on his own resources.

#### PLASTICISM

Among the critics of the older theatre are many who find their chief objection in the two-dimensional quality of the "picture-frame" stage,

and who insist that what the theatre most needs is to get away from the whole idea of a painted picture and develop a plastic or three-dimensional quality.

In its earlier manifestations this movement was at least partly associated with realism. Among the first reforms accomplished were the abolition of painted drops, especially in shallow sets; the avoidance of painted shadows; the substitution of three-dimensional set pieces for painted flats; and the improvement of the lighting system to give a sense of depth. Later came attempts to revive the forestage or apron; attempts to modify or abolish the proscenium arch and to establish a platform or sculptural stage; and finally the development of the space stage—which, because the background is in darkness, may be sculptural in effect regardless of whether it is within a proscenium frame or not. In these later developments, however, the realistic purpose has practically disappeared and plasticism has become associated with formalism, or expressionism. This is particularly true of the darkened space stage; it is less true of arena stages of the Penthouse-Theatre type, in which the foreground technique is often quite realistic.

The attempt to get a plastic effect by reviving the forestage or apron stage in conjunction with a proscenium frame has been generally unsuccessful, and for a very good reason. When there is a proscenium frame, that frame fixes the limits of the composition and establishes the æsthetic distance; and when the actor steps through the frame and out on to the apron he seems to step out of the picture, and so breaks down that distance. It was the gradual recognition of this fault that led to the abolition of the apron; and no artistic purpose can be accomplished by merely going backwards.

The true platform stage without a proscenium frame is another matter; and plastic effects can be achieved on such a stage without destruction of æsthetic distance, provided the actor is able to maintain the magic spell of illusion. That is why Norman Bel Geddes, in Reinhardt's production of *The Miracle*, concealed the proscenium completely with his cathedral vaults and arches. He did the same sort of thing—less completely and so less successfully—in his designs for *Lysistrata* and *Hamlet*. In all attempts to restore the platform stage, light plays an important part, and the more nearly we approach the technique of the space stage

the more completely plastic the effect. Even the arena stage, when used as a space stage, with only the essential action picked out by the light, can preserve æsthetic distance effectively; and it is the most plastic of all stages.

#### EXPRESSIONISM

Many different motives have been confused under the general name of expressionism, and many different styles and methods lend themselves to the expressionistic purpose; but the purpose itself is fairly distinct.

Expressionism in the theatre is a borrowing from the other arts; and in those arts—especially painting—it came about in some degree as a development beyond *impressionism*. Impressionism as a distinct movement does not seem to have had much effect on the theatre, perhaps because it had played itself out in painting before the revolt in the theatre attained its full growth; or because scene painting, in one sense, has always been impressionistic anyhow. In painting, impressionism was both a theory and a style. As a theory it was anti-realistic, and involved the attempt of the artist to represent nature, not necessarily as it was, but as he thought he saw it—to represent, in a word, his impression of life. This led to sketchiness, and to the development of a particular style, based largely on the application of unblended colors in small but distinct blotches, to be psychologically blended by the observer—sometimes with the aid of a good deal of imagination and some squinting. Other sketchy styles not generally called impressionistic were equally in keeping with the theory.

The theory, however, did not satisfy some anti-realists, who said, "What we want is not the artist's *impression* of nature, but his *expression* of himself. We want his creative vision, not his observation. We want abstraction not alone in the means but in the purpose. We want something that will transcend nature, free the spirit, enable the artist to reveal his emotions and reach those of his public directly, as the lyric poet does—something greater, not less, than reality."

So began expressionism, and so it was transferred to the theatre. But the expressionist, no less than the impressionist, got himself tangled up with particular styles—post-impressionistic, cubistic, futuristic, construc-

tivistic, surrealist, and what not—and frequently confused his purposes with his peculiarities of technique. As a result he has been generally misunderstood, in the theatre as well as in painting; and his messages of the spirit have often failed to reach the audience.

Expressionism in the theatre can hardly be illustrated photographically, particularly without the use of color; the style can be shown, but not the emotional effect. The true expressionist uses not only the setting but all the elements of the production, including the acting and the lighting; and by fluid, emotional manipulation of light he makes the light itself an actor. His purpose is to make all the sensory elements of the production a single unified instrument for expressing the inner experience and attitude of the protagonist, and perhaps, through him, of the author.

*The Beggar on Horseback*, with its distorted and exaggerated dream scenes, was a fair example of expressionism; so was Channing Pollock's *Mr. Moneybags*. The Theatre Guild productions of *From Morn to Midnight* and *The Adding Machine* were good examples, the scenery in each of these consistently symbolizing the character's state of mind rather than the place. One of the most interesting examples in recent years was Saroyan's *Jim Dandy*. This play was released through the National Theatre Conference, and produced almost simultaneously in some forty college and community theatres. No two settings were alike. The author calls for a library desk, some chairs and tables, a cozy-corner couch for the librarian, a noisy cash register, a revolving door with no surrounding wall, several stairways going nowhere, and a player piano. He specifies no style or arrangement, and the expressionistic purpose was achieved by some directors with realistic elements and by others with a high degree of stylization (Plate 19).<sup>2</sup> The action of the play takes place "in what the author chooses to call the reading room of the public library in San Francisco, but in reality is no such place." It is really the arena of the human mind and soul, and the furnishings—real or stylized—symbolize the attitudes and experiences of human beings.

Expressionism in the theatre is as elemental in its appeal as lyric poetry, and quite as difficult to describe or analyze; but unlike lyric poetry it is in its infancy, and its greatest possibilities are yet to be realized. In its purpose to transcend life and to reveal the artist's own

<sup>2</sup> Seven other settings were illustrated in *Theatre Arts* in July, 1942.



dream or vision it is very close to the essential magic of the theatre, and so is theoretically sound; but in some of its aspects it involves practical limitations and perhaps one theoretical one.

The theoretical limitation is that after all neither the artist nor the observer can really envision anything except in terms of this world; that imagination is but a conjuring up and reassembling of memories, or impressions. Expressionism therefore can be only a kind of larger impressionism—something carried a step further and made a degree more abstract, but still essentially the same.

The practical limitations include the difficulty of separating the methods of expressionism from the methods of other schools, the absence of an established language of abstractions for the theatre, comparable to the language of music (the most truly expressionistic of the arts), and the almost prohibitively high order of technique required to convey a pure mood or a lyric emotion without self-conscious strain or distraction. Because of these difficulties, the expressionists—like the symbolists and formalists—have usually found it expedient to compromise; and so we find many essentially expressionistic productions involving elements of realism, or symbolism, or stylization.

One type of so-called expressionistic painting which has often found its way to the stage is the type sometimes described as primitivism. It consists largely of distorted angles and reverse perspective and resembles more than anything else the drawings made by insane persons, or by children just learning to draw. Right angles are ignored; doors and windows are made triangular or trapezoidal; houses appear top-heavy and unbalanced; and perspective lines diverge when they should converge. One of the most effective settings of the kind was used years ago in the silent photoplay *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* to express the insanity of the principal character. On the stage such settings are seldom effective as pure expressionism, though sometimes quite effective as stylization—notably in the *Chauve Souris*. Even the Caligari settings owed much of their effectiveness to the stylistic flavor, and to the extraordinary excellence of the composition.

Many scenic artists have attempted to create mood expressionistically by designing sets in vague, soft tones and blurred outlines. Some of Gordon Craig's designs are of this type, and some of the early ones of Robert Edmond Jones. It is easy to create a misty softness on paper

with brush and pencil, but extremely difficult to realize it on the stage, for the very good reason that the eye of the observer is a focusing instrument. You can paint the soft effect on the back drop, but the foreground elements will then look inconsistently sharp against it. The eye adjusts itself even to soft lighting, and picks out details not meant to be seen. Some technicians even try to soften edges with fringes of skillfully painted gauze; but such softness, if successful, only makes the actor seem more sharply real by contrast. It is hardly practical to fringe the actor with gauze.

The most effective instruments of expressionism in the theatre, apart from the actor himself, are music, rhythm, color, and light. The use of music in this connection is not new; the soft music accompanying sentimental or pathetic scenes in the theatres of yesterday was really a form of expressionism. Rhythm, apart from music, is tremendous in its possibilities, and as yet almost undeveloped, except in the ballet. Color has been used decoratively and symbolically, but its potentialities in connection with light have only recently been recognized. It is with light, of course, that the expressionist designer chiefly works, and his greatest achievements so far have undoubtedly been those of the space stage, in which light is virtually the only setting. Some good results have also been attained with scenery projected in light with spotlights or "sciopticons" (Plate 23).

#### CUBISM AND ITS DERIVATIVES

Scenic artists have borrowed so heavily at times from the cubist and other non-representational painters that a word about the relation of cubism to the theatre seems necessary.

Cubism began, apparently, as a kind of expressionism. It was not a motive in itself, but a method of attaining the necessary abstraction to serve an expressionistic purpose. The cubist made use of line, mass, and color in illogical—but sometimes very beautiful—arrangements of squares and rectangles, hoping to express emotion or mood through pure composition. Others carried the same idea farther by adding triangles and other geometric figures, and finally by abandoning as far as possible all recognized forms and using only the most meaningless combinations of line, mass, and color that could be devised. In so doing, they often became stylists as well as expressionists, and eventually stylists rather than

expressionists. Much of the best non-representational painting is really pure design, with a decorative rather than an expressionistic purpose.

Transferred to the theatre, cubism and its derivatives have usually been stylistic in their chief effect, though often hailed as expressionistic. The typical "futurist" setting is far too obtrusive, too puzzling, too challenging, to be directly emotional. It may be decorative, and parts of it may be symbolic; but it lacks the subordination necessary to the most powerful expressionism.

### CONSTRUCTIVISM

Another outgrowth of expressionism was the type of setting originated by Meyerhold in Russia, and known as the "constructivist" setting. Meyerhold called it a step beyond expressionism and spoke of it as "bio-mechanical"—whatever that means.

The constructivist setting ranges from a fairly substantial but inconsequential grouping of platforms and steps that lead nowhere to the most amazing collection of torn and twisted junk, suggestive of home-built scaffoldings or bomb-damaged factories. There is usually no scenery in the ordinary sense, no background except the brick wall of the theatre with its iron ladders and hanging lines.

Needless to say, constructivism is anti-realistic—more violently so than any other movement. In addition it has three distinctive motives: to provide the most varied and flexible arrangement of the playing space; to free the inner meaning of the play from the entanglements of decorative beauty; and to reflect the spirit of the machine age. At the time of its inception there was a fourth motive which is not so often mentioned: the scarcity of materials for more conventional settings in a Moscow torn by revolution.

That these motives are not as original as they sound, a little thought will quickly reveal. The first motive has been that of experienced directors for generations; they have sought variety in the arrangement of the playing space for the sake of variety in movement and grouping. Even the use of different heights and levels, of ramps and stairs, did not originate with constructivism; these have been used for years by the realists, and have been highly developed by the formalists and plasticists. The practice no doubt stems from the two-level stages of the Greeks,

the Elizabethans, and the Chinese. Meyerhold and his followers, however, carried it to fantastic extremes, with acrobatic actors racing up and down ladders, swinging from trapezes, turning somersaults, leaping from platform to platform, and expressing the dynamics of art in the manner of a Tarzan. The second motive is basically an attempt to subordinate decoration to meaning—the original fundamental principle of good design—but the method chosen, that of deliberate *anti*-decorativeness, is unsound, because it ignores the fact that insistent ugliness is even more distracting than beauty. The third motive—to reflect the spirit of the machine age—is pure stylization. The fourth needs no explanation.

In its more extreme forms, constructivism is, it seems to me, essentially bad. It is bad because it obtrudes and distracts; because it violates the most fundamental purpose of the background by revealing the back-stage uglinesses which we do not wish to see; and because it creates unpleasant empathic effects by stationing groups of actors on apparently flimsy platforms and ladders, and by deliberately ignoring the laws of gravity, balance, and proportion. When a so-called constructivist setting proves effective, it is usually because it is not constructivist enough to be ugly or distracting, but does have elements of successful symbolism or formalism or stylization—and perhaps of beauty (Plate 11).

#### SURREALISM

One of the newer forms of expressionism in painting is that known as surrealism. So far it has done little damage in the theatre, and in its worst forms is not adapted to theatre techniques. It lends itself more readily to the trick photography of the motion picture, and Hollywood is experimenting with it; but it does not seem likely to upset the preference of the movie-going masses for realism.

In its declared motives, surrealism is as justifiable as any other kind of expressionism, including that of music or of mystic poetry. It aims to express the inner—particularly the unconscious—experiences of man through the use of disconnected or fragmentary symbols of reality assembled without regard to the logic of time or place, as in the disordered ramblings of a dream. The elements may be significant and suggestive, but their arrangement is wholly irrational; if there is any design at all it is that of abstract composition, not that of logical sequence or literal

meaning. There is nothing new in this principle. The poets and musicians have followed it for years; so have abstract artists in other fields who did not call themselves surrealists.

But surrealism—like cubism—has come to be thought of as a style, or mode, rather than a principle. It just happens that many of the leading exponents of surrealism so called have been stylists of similar tastes, and with similar kinds of images running through their subconscious minds. As a result the term has come to be associated with pictures in lurid, emotional colors, showing dismembered fragments of human bodies, gigantic insects, broken wrecks of trees or houses, drooping watches, distorted faces, and all sorts of ugly, painful, slimy, crawling things. If these are expressions of the unconscious, most of those who call themselves surrealists must have abnormally dirty, neurotic, sadistic minds, and more than their share of Freudian obsessions.

Clean-minded theatre workers will have little use for surrealism as a style. But they will have more and more use for its expressionistic principle. There is room in the theatre for much more abstraction than we have had—abstraction of the sort found in mystic poetry and in symphony music. *Jim Dandy* was a noteworthy experiment in this direction; it conformed precisely to the theory of surrealism, but not at all to the style of the surrealists. Its content bore no resemblance to the content of surrealist minds. It is to be hoped that other playwrights with worthy and beautiful things to say will study the technique of *Jim Dandy* and try their hands at abstract composition in terms of the theatre, but in a variety of styles. The increasing vogue of the modern ballet suggests a trend in that direction.

#### SUBORDINATION

A comparison of the various anti-realistic movements, including simplified realism, and a consideration of their best features, seem to lead us back to the old utilitarian basis of good design, the principle of subordination. Subordination of the unessential to the essential is after all the one thing upon which the best designers of all schools agree. True, they sometimes disagree as to what is essential, but that is the inevitably variable human factor. The best realism is simplified realism; the best symbolism is that which captures the significant mood; the best stylization is colorful, but subordinate; the best formalism keeps the background

neutral and accentuates the action; the best plasticism vitalizes the actor and makes him dominate the playing space; and the best expressionism is that which reveals an inner experience with the least possible interference from non-essentials.

The type of setting that seems to follow most rigorously this common principle of subordination is that of the space stage; and its chief instrument of subordination is the manipulation of light. The true space stage, however, has one serious limitation. When the background is a complete void and all the light is concentrated on the action, the emotional power of the light—as well as its command over attention—is tremendous. The result is a sustained intensity which is not suitable for all plays, or for all scenes. To make all scenes of all plays emotionally intense is to weaken the power of emphasis by destroying contrast, just as habitual profanity weakens the power of expression in emergency. It would seem wise, therefore, to use the methods of the space stage with some restraint and some modifications.

If the director, or designer, will remember that art is not reality, that the artist's duty is always to suggest rather than to portray, and that suppression of distraction is the first rule of good composition, he will be able to employ appropriate elements of simplification, symbolism, stylization, or expressionism as the need may arise, and still achieve unity through subordination. Let us have more and more variety of style and method in our theatre; but let us not be hypnotized by any style into forgetting the basic principles of good design. These do not change.



## *Back-Stage Mechanics*

BOOKS on play production have generally offered more help on the problems of stagecraft than on those of acting or directing; some of them, in fact, are almost entirely devoted to stagecraft, as if it were the whole problem. It is my feeling that such matters should always be subordinate to good directing and good acting; and that most amateurs, with their energy and ingenuity, need less help in the mechanics of play mounting than in the art of directing.

Nevertheless, since this book is for the beginner, I shall try to present briefly some of the more important aspects of stage mechanics, both standard and experimental; and in the final chapter to suggest some simple and relatively inexpensive techniques, some ways of avoiding common pitfalls and solving common problems, and some possible limitations and objectives.

### STANDARD THEATRE EQUIPMENT

The amateur director should know the usual working equipment of the commercial theatre, not only because he may some time have to work in one, but because that type of theatre represents better than any other the accumulation of practical experience, and is of necessity made adaptable to the widest possible variety of productions. Many of the newer school, college, and community theatres are designed and equipped very much in the manner of the commercial theatre; and a few of them—like the McCarter Theatre at Princeton, the theatres at Wisconsin, Indiana, Stanford, and Yale, the Cleveland Playhouse, and the Pasadena Playhouse—are more elaborately equipped on the same general plan, with modifications and refinements.

The standard theatre stage today is level—not sloped as in eighteenth-century theatres—with no “grooves,” no permanent scenery, and no obstructions in or near the playing space. The floor is of soft wood, to

permit of the use of screw braces, and is "trapped"—that is, built in sections, certain of which may be taken up to provide for trap doors; in very

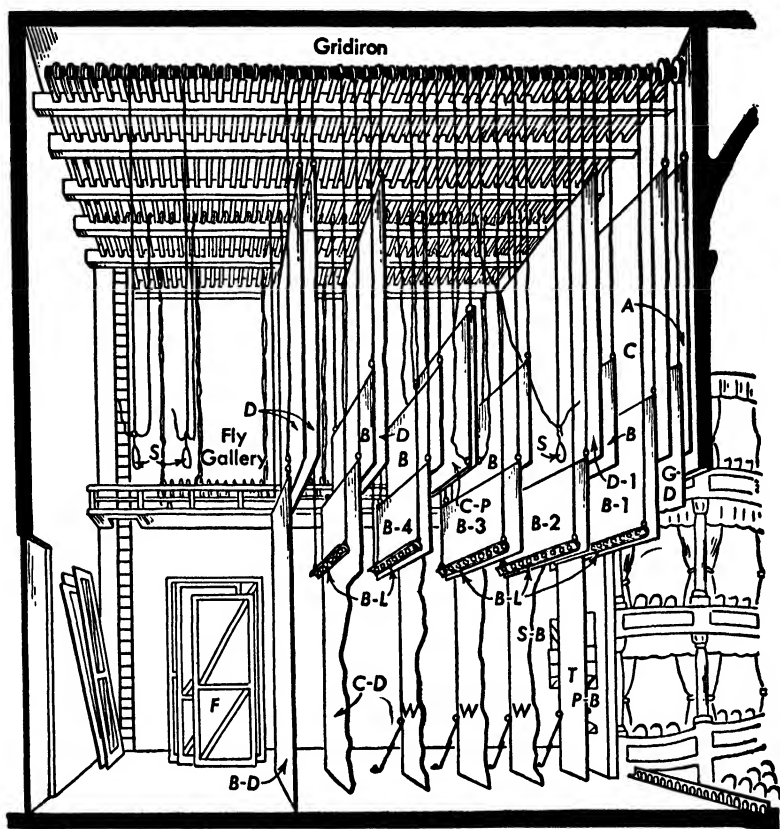


FIG. 25. CONVENTIONAL THEATRE EQUIPMENT.

*A*, asbestos fire curtain; *B-1*, first border or teaser; *B-2-3-4*, other borders, set; *B-B*, other borders, flied; *B-D*, back drop; *B-L*, border lights; *C*, curtain or act drop; *C-D*, cut drop; *C-P*, ceiling-piece (pocketbook type); *D-1*, drop used as backing for scenes "in one"; *D-D*, other drops, flied; *F*, flats, stored for next act; *G-D*, grand drapery (omitted in many modern theatres); *P-B*, prompt box, and *S-B*, switchboard (more often on stage right); *S-S*, sand bags on idle lines; *T*, tormentor; *W-W*, wing flats.

elaborate theatres or opera houses the sections are capable of being raised or lowered mechanically to give several different playing levels. The Town Hall in Philadelphia—formerly the Scottish Rites Hall—has a stage consisting entirely of counterweighted sections, each of which can



be raised or lowered quickly by hand and locked securely in place at any height, above or below stage level. The stage space is always much larger than the visible playing space; in the best theatres it is as large again behind, above, and on each side.

Above the stage, usually a little more than twice as high as the proscenium opening and sometimes much higher, is the gridiron, a most im-

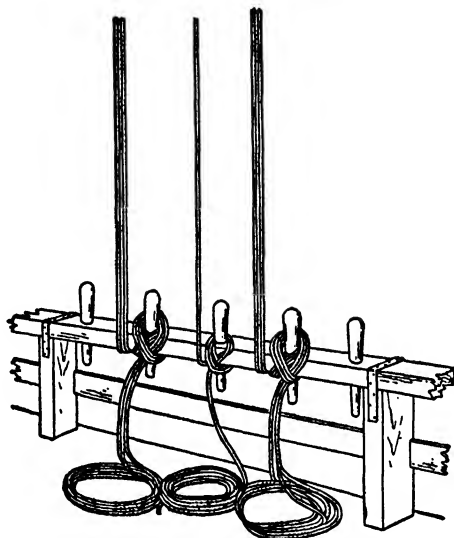


FIG. 26. PIN RAIL.

portant item in standard theatre equipment (see Fig. 25). It is a skeleton platform of wood or iron, and on it are mounted rows of pulleys to carry the "lines" on which certain pieces of scenery are hauled up out of sight when not in use. The space above the stage is known as the "flies," and a piece of scenery hauled up on the lines is said to be "fled"—though many modern theatre workers whose feeling for grammar is more sensitive than their feeling for logic and tradition are now saying "flown." The "fly gallery" is a gallery at one side of the stage, twenty or thirty feet high, from which the lines are operated. The lines are rigged in sets of three (or more in very large theatres), and are tied to the drop or other piece of scenery at as many points. Each line is carried straight up to a pulley, or sheave, on the gridiron, then over to the gallery side over another pulley and down to the fly gallery. The gallery rail, known as the "pin rail," is like the rail of a ship, with rows of belaying pins for

the lines (Fig. 26). The three lines of each set are handled and belayed as one. When a set is not in use, the three stage ends are tied together, and weighted with a sandbag, which is hauled up in the flies and belayed.<sup>1</sup> In some of the smaller theatres the fly gallery is omitted, and the pin rail placed close to the wall at stage level (Plate 25-d).

When a heavy piece of scenery is to be raised and lowered during the run of a play, it is usually counterweighted with a large sandbag, fastened to the three lines at once with a metal clamp. To facilitate mounting such a sandbag there is usually an extra rope on a separate pulley beside each set of lines; the bag is attached to this rope and hauled up into position for clamping. If the bag is a little heavier than the scenery, the extra line can be left attached to it and used as a "down-haul."

There are many sets of lines in a large theatre, spaced as closely as possible from the proscenium to the rear wall of the stage, so that vast quantities of scenery can be hauled up out of the way. Most of the scenery, however, is brought in and mounted for a particular play, and carried away afterwards; the only pieces in the flies that belong permanently to the theatre are the fire curtain or "asbestos," the working curtain or "act drop," the "teaser" or first border, and perhaps a decorative "grand drapery" either before or behind the act drop. The grand drapery is often omitted, and sometimes the teaser is known by that name. The teaser, however, is behind the act drop, and may be adjusted between acts to fix the height of the proscenium opening. It is handled on an ordinary set of lines. The act drop is always counterweighted and is operated by a hand line on the counterweight, or by a geared windlass to permit of rapid raising and lowering; in many modern theatres it is operated electrically, and in a few of the largest and most modern all the lines are so operated, with automatic counterweights. The fire curtain, which is usually very heavy, is partly counterweighted; but in most cities the law requires that it be so rigged as to descend of its own weight when released by hand, either from the fly gallery or the prompter's box. Usually it is held up by a small checkrope which may be cut in an emergency by a knife kept hanging beside it.

<sup>1</sup> Persons who are to handle scenery should know how to make knots that will not come loose; otherwise somebody may be killed by a falling sandbag or drop. The *Boy Scout and Girl Scout Handbooks* contain excellent instructions for tying knots. Most important is the "sheet bend," the only safe method of tying a thin rope to a thick one. Also very important are the "bowline knot," the "clove hitch," and the distinction between a "reef knot" and a "granny."

The only scenery on the stage floor that remains in place as part of the theatre is the pair of wing flats just behind the curtain line, known as "tormentors," and used to regulate the width of the proscenium opening as well as to mask the sides of the setting. The rest of the stage is clear until a set is brought in and mounted. In a modern theatre the tormentors are often drapes rather than flats; in that case they are usually hung from the teaser batten and operated with the same set of lines.

A standard outdoor set consists of a back drop and several "borders," which are hung in the flies and handled from the gallery, and a number of "wings"<sup>2</sup> which are handled on the stage floor. Each wing is a painted flat, with a hinged flap to give it stability; it is merely dragged into place and braced from behind with one or two stage braces, screwed to the floor. In addition to the wings, borders, and drops, there may be set pieces or special pieces—trees, rocks, houses, fences—which are handled in various ways according to their nature, some as properties, some as flats, and some as fly pieces. Occasionally a whole setting is flied for convenience in making a quick change. Draperies are often used instead of wing flats, in which case they are hung from battens, as are the borders. A drape used as a wing is often called a "leg."

A standard indoor setting consists of canvas flats, handled on the stage floor, set up, lashed together, and braced, with a ceiling piece let down from the flies and opened out to lie on top of the flats. There are two types of ceilings; one is a single large flat, which must be hauled up by one edge; the other is hinged on the long diameter and folds up like a pocketbook as the center is flied. Doors, and sometimes windows, are mounted in separate frames; these are set into openings in the canvas flats and independently braced, so that they will stand firm when opened or closed, and not shake the walls. Many modern professional sets, especially for one-set plays, are very substantially built, with panels, cornices, archways, stairways, landings, very heavy door frames—all in the interest of realism.

<sup>2</sup> Strictly, wing flats—the wings being properly the spaces off stage to the right and left. In stage lingo, adjectives often come to be used as nouns; the border lights, for example, are commonly spoken of as "the borders." Properly the borders are shallow drops, hung above the stage to mask the flies, in sets having no ceilings. Such borders are sometimes miscalled "flies," perhaps because they were once called "fly borders." Stage terminology is very interesting, but extremely unstable and relatively unimportant. Beginners in the theatre like to air their knowledge of it, but are apt to take it too seriously. Professionals get over that; I have heard actors of long experience boast that they did not know an olivette from a scene brace.

The standard commercial-theatre lighting system consists of footlights, several rows of border lights (strips of lights hung in the flies behind the borders), portable floodlights and spotlights, portable strips, and perhaps a few spotlights mounted on the balcony or concealed in the ceiling beams of the auditorium. The portable lights may be plugged in at various "pockets" on the stage floor, which are usually controlled by switches and dimmers on the regular switchboard. The footlights and borders are controlled in three or four circuits for separate colors: white, blue, red, and perhaps amber. They are operated from the switchboard and are connected with dimmers, which are usually interlocking, so that all the colors may be dimmed at once, or all the circuits of one color.

The switchboard is normally located behind the proscenium frame at one side; sometimes it is elevated, with a platform for the operator high enough to be out of the way of the prompter and the actors using the prompt entrance. In a modern experimental theatre it is sometimes placed in a booth at the back of the auditorium, so that the operator may see the stage; opinion is divided on the advantage of this arrangement. The prompter is usually stationed on the same side as the switchboard—sometimes right under it—and is provided with a small reading desk close to the proscenium frame. Over the desk are push buttons operating signals in the fly gallery, orchestra pit, and dressing rooms.

All this is very elementary, but the equipment of the standard theatre is so different from that of the heterogeneous and badly designed clubhouses, halls, and schools in which amateurs usually play that even an experienced amateur may feel very strange if called upon to play in one. Few of the older commercial theatres have, as regular equipment, the flexible lighting units, the cycloramas or sky domes, the draperies, the revolving or wagon stages often found in the newer college and community theatres, and in a few up-to-date high schools; on the other hand, almost no commercial theatre is afflicted with the solid stage walls and ceilings, or misdesigned lighting systems commonly found in the older—and some of the newer—halls and clubhouses. The advantage of the commercial theatre is in its bareness and its adaptability; practically any kind of equipment usable elsewhere can be mounted and handled in a standard theatre, while standard equipment cannot always be handled in the art theatres and can seldom be handled in halls and clubhouses.

It is true that one sometimes sees a very elaborate production with

modern equipment in a commercial theatre, even a "road" theatre. As a general rule, such equipment belongs to the show, and not to the theatre, and is set up and operated by the company crew.

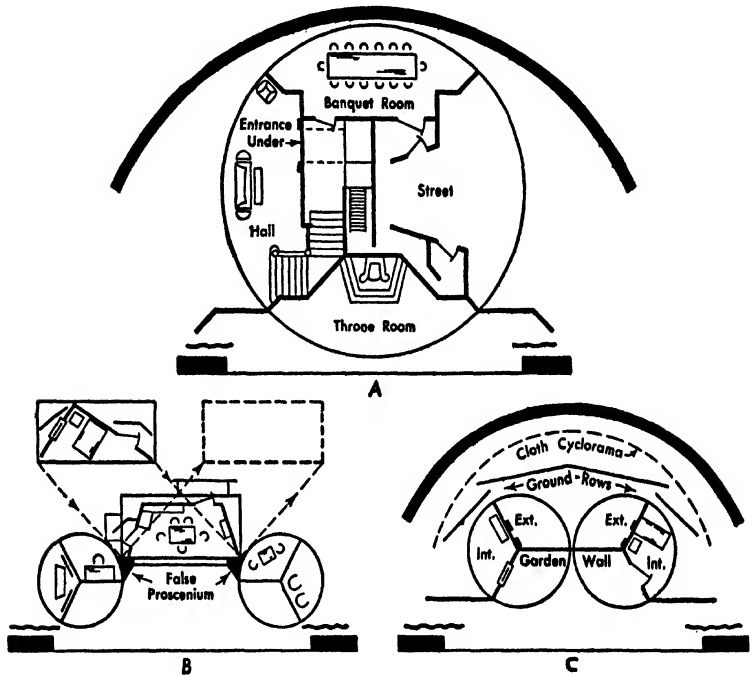


FIG. 27. PLANS OF REVOLVING STAGES.

The large turntable, *A*, almost requires special scenery and a cyclorama or dome. *B* is merely a modified wagon stage with two small turntables for side vignettes. *C* is a popular type with two adjacent turntables; the cloth cyclorama would be used on the road.

#### REVOLVING, WAGON, AND JACK-KNIFE STAGES

The circular revolving stage is a rarity in commercial theatres, but modified forms have been used in a good many professional productions in recent years. A single large turntable, occupying the whole stage (*A*, Fig. 27), is not easily portable, and has been used in very few road shows. It is more suitable for permanent installation, and has enjoyed some popularity in Europe, but has some serious disadvantages. It requires specially designed, often expensive scenery, and presents difficult

problems in masking. The one built into the New Theatre (later the Century Theatre) in New York in 1910 was used only two or three times in twenty-five years. But the small turntable used to rotate a single sculptural unit, like the one Margaret Webster employed in *The Tempest*, can be carried on the road and installed on top of the regular stage floor. Still more common is a superimposed stage combining two or three such turntables of equal or unequal size, or combining one or more turntables with various types of "wagon stages"—that is, sliding or rolling platforms (usually on rubber casters) on which scenery may be set up

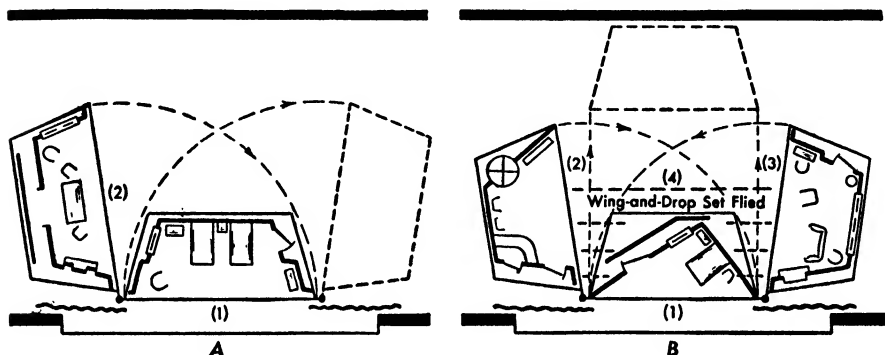


FIG. 28. JACK-KNIFE STAGES.

*A* shows a simple jack-knife stage with two wagons. *B* shows a more elaborate setup, with two pivoted wagons, one rolling wagon moving straight back, and a wing-and-drop set carried in the flies. Backings for doors and windows often have to be added behind the wagons; also exit platforms or ramps (as in Fig. 27, *B*).

in advance (*B*, *C*, Fig. 27). The New York production of *The Eve of St. Mark* made use of two fairly large turntables almost touching each other at stage center. *I Remember Mama* used two small turntables at right and left to change the tormentors and provide backings for small spot-lighted scenes, in addition to the large unit which changed the main set at stage center.

The most popular and most practical form of "revolving" stage, however, is not the circular type, but the so-called "jack-knife" stage—basically a pair of pivoted wagon stages, used in alternation (Fig. 28). These are usually rather small to insure room back stage for their operation. The proscenium is masked down by wide tormentors or drapes, and the wagon to be used first, with a set mounted on it, fills this narrowed space. It is fitted with rubber casters or rollers, and pivoted at

one side just behind the curtain-line. When a change is to be made, the whole wagon swings back on its pivot, clearing the stage; and another wagon, pivoted on the opposite side, swings into position with the second set already mounted on it—and sometimes with the actors in their places. Two substantial sets can thus be alternated without “striking” either. If more are required, the set on the retracted wagon can be struck and replaced while action goes forward on the wagon in use—not, however, without some risk of distracting noise, and the necessity for a great deal of “shush-shushing.” Where there is sufficient depth of stage, the jack-knife arrangement can be combined with one or more free wagons, to be rolled forward into position when both halves of the jack-knife are retracted (*B*, Fig. 28), or with a circular turntable at stage center. It can also be combined with drops let down from the flies, or even with a small box set battened together and flied as a whole.

In the fast-moving production of *Grand Hotel*, the prologue was a shallow set, which was flied in a few seconds, and replaced by the lobby scene—a very substantial set, with revolving doors, a heavy counter, and solid-looking walls. Mounted on a jack-knife wagon pivoted at stage right, this was used in a number of scenes, and never struck—though in one scene a shallow hall set was mounted inside it on the same wagon. The left wagon carried several different scenes which were used in alternation with the lobby scene, and changed while the latter was in use. As most of the action in the lobby was noisy, these changes could be made with little danger of their being heard (Plate 10-b).

In an earlier play called *The Silent Witness*, a jack-knife stage was used for the rapid alternation of two very elaborate realistic scenes. A courtroom scene, with judge, jury, and spectators, was interrupted by several “flash backs” to the room in which a murder had occurred, so that the murder could be reenacted, differently each time, as the various witnesses described it. The shift was accomplished in a few seconds, during a “black-out.”

The purpose of all revolving and rolling stages is, of course, to permit rapid changes of scene without sacrifice of substantiality and realistic detail. But they are open to some serious objections.

Theoretically they can be made to operate silently. Practically, they never are. In spite of the rubber casters they produce atrocious rumbling sounds, unpleasant and distracting. The circular forms seem worse

in this respect than the jack-knife form—perhaps because they are more often operated with the curtain up, either visibly or in a black-out. The sincerity and illusion of *The Eve of St. Mark*—successfully maintained in many little theatres by simplicity and restraint—were shattered in the Broadway production by the obtrusive rumbling of those two turntables every few minutes. The two side turntables in *I Remember Mama*, being closer to the audience, were even noisier, and would have been still more offensive if there had been any unity of mood to be broken. When revolving or jack-knife stages are used only with the curtain down, and with music to cover the interval, they may at times justify themselves. Generally, however, they call attention to themselves as a cumbersome elaboration, often quite unnecessary to the spirit of the play.

Another objection is the temptation to excessive speed, with corresponding difficulties in timing. In *The Silent Witness*, for example, each change was supposed to be preceded by a black-out. Either the stage manager was too quick with his crew signal or the electrician was too slow in his reaction time, for whenever the courtroom scene was supposed to vanish the jack-knife started to retract before the lights were out, and the audience was left with a retinal image of a whole box-full of jurors being yanked backwards with a suddenness that made all their heads snap forward in unison—hardly a pleasant empathic effect!

Even when everything works silently and smoothly, there is still a psychological objection to the whole idea of elaborate changes accomplished with unbelievable speed. In the movies we think nothing of it, because we are seeing it all through the eye of a camera that can be started, stopped, and moved at will. But in the theatre we are well aware of what we see as an actual presence, and inclined to marvel at a particularly elaborate and substantial scene for its very realism; and when it suddenly vanishes and is replaced by another we are more startled and amazed than imaginatively persuaded. What impresses us is not the sincerity of illusion, but the mechanical trickery of the stunt. It may be very good “show business,” but it is not good art.

#### SIMPLIFIED UNIT SETTINGS

A more legitimate and more artistic method of combining substantiality with easy, rapid change is through the use of some kind of unit setting, more or less formal in effect—a method used in both commercial and



non-commercial theatres, though less often in the former. There are two basic forms of unit sets.

The first consists of a number of units, such as screens, pylons, drapes, arches, platforms, steps, and walls, which may be used through the successive scenes of a play in slightly different arrangements. One of the earliest—and best—examples was the set designed by Claude Bragdon for Walter Hampden's repertory (Plate 12). It permitted enough variations for half a dozen Shakespearean plays; yet each change was made very quickly by raising or lowering a drape, closing up an archway, removing a wall from one side or shifting a flight of steps from one spot to another. Each suggested a slight change of locality, but no change of mode, and no engineering exploit. The method has been largely confined to the more formal settings for classical plays, but there is no reason why it cannot be modified to include simplified realism for modern plays. If a modern play can be done satisfactorily with no scenery at all, as in the Penthouse Theatre, it can certainly be done with a variable unit set.

The other form of unit set consists of a more or less formal built unit, framing the greater part of the playing space, and remaining throughout the play, but with an inner proscenium, or with several arches or panels, the inserts or backings of which are changed for different scenes (Fig. 24; Plates 13-b, 30, 31). This is really an evolutionary modification of the inner and outer stages of Elizabethan times, and has long been used in the commercial theatre in a great variety of styles. Joseph Urban designed many sets of this sort, some for the Metropolitan Opera; Sothorn and Marlowe used the type known as a "skeleton set" (Fig. 24) in some of their Shakespearean productions; Winthrop Ames used it, with a single inner proscenium, for the George Arliss *Merchant of Venice*; there were various modifications of it in the Theatre Guild's *School for Husbands*, the Lunt-Fontanne production of *The Taming of the Shrew*, and the John Barrymore *Hamlet*. Margaret Webster's production of *The Tempest*, following the spirit of earlier designs by Norman Bel Geddes for *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, adapted the unit principle to space-stage effects by using a single sculptural unit, changed only by rotation on a pivoted turntable (Plate 4). This type of setting can be dynamic and beautiful, but tends to suggest a somewhat self-consciously artful kind of formalism.

## MODERN LIGHTING SYSTEMS

In the experimental application of modern improvements in stage lighting, the non-commercial theatres—following the lead of the state-supported art theatres of Europe—have quite generally outstripped the American commercial theatre. A few commercial producers, led by David Belasco, did spend much time and money developing elaborations in the interest of realism; but for a long time the majority of Broadway productions were conventionally lighted, with the standard apparatus already described.

One reason for this backwardness was a natural caution about spending money for installations in a New York theatre that could not be used on the road. That difficulty has now been largely overcome through the use of portable switchboards and dimmer units, portable spotlights and floodlights, for use on balcony rails as well as back stage, and portable cables to feed them. The *Grand Hotel* company, for example, carried all its own lights, some mounted on the balcony and some on the sets themselves; they were operated by company electricians from a large bank of “piano-case” dimmers back stage, on signal-light cues from the assistant stage manager, who sat at a specially designed control desk just back of the right tormentor drape. The only connection with the house installation was a heavy-duty “hot line” from the main current supply; and the only function of the house electrician was to provide that line and to turn the house lights on or off on a signal from the control desk. The rest of the house crew were paid union wages to keep out of the way while the company crew ran the show. Most road shows are now organized that way. It is an expensive system, but gives almost unlimited flexibility in designing the lighting to fit the show, and insures uniformity and reliability on the road.

A well-designed modern theatre, commercial or otherwise, may, of course, have a flexible lighting system of its own. Here and there one finds an exceptionally elaborate installation, like the one at Severence Hall in Cleveland, or the still more spectacular one at the Radio City Music Hall. Each of these has a switchboard built like an organ console, and played very much like one, from a booth out front where the operator can see the stage. The one at Severence Hall cost something like \$90,000 for the console alone, and the Radio City console is still more

elaborate. Such super-colossal installations, however, have little to do with the subject of this book.

The switchboard is the heart of any lighting system, and a few words about the more common types may not be amiss.

The earlier boards were of the "live-front" type; that is, the switches—usually open knife switches—were mounted right on the front of the board where one might accidentally touch them and be badly shocked. The dimmers (if any) were similarly mounted. A few such boards may still be found in very old theatres, but in most states they have long since been outlawed and replaced by the "dead-front" type. The dead-front board is what the name implies; all live wires, switches, and dimmers are behind the board, and only insulated handles project through the panel, so that any visible part of the board may be touched without danger of shock.

Electrically, there are two basic types of boards: direct-control and remote-control. The direct-control board, used chiefly in the smaller theatres, or in portable installations, may have few circuits or many. It may have a dimmer in every circuit, or detachable, interchangeable dimmers to be plugged in as needed; or it may have some rigged one way and some the other. It may have a single pre-set arrangement by which all the circuits in one color may be pre-set through a sub-master switch, and all the sub-masters through the stage main. But the working part of each switch is actually on the back of the board, and the current for the corresponding circuit actually passes through the switch. In the remote-control board the switch on the panel is only a pilot switch; when it is turned on, a small amount of current passes through it and operates an electromagnet on a heavy contactor board (usually placed in a fireproof basement), and that throws a larger switch on the contactor board which turns on the actual circuit. This system can be used for just one master switch, or for a few heavy-duty circuits, or for a whole switchboard of fifty or a hundred circuits, with a corresponding number of relays on the contactor board. The dimmers, however, are usually operated directly, and the full current passes through them behind the main board (Plate 32-a).

Two advantages are claimed for the remote-control board. One is its greater safety in handling heavy currents, since any flash on making or breaking the circuit occurs in the relay room and not on the stage. The

other is its adaptability to "multiple-pre-set" control, by which the lights for five or ten or more scenes may be pre-set before the performance, to be turned on in each case by a single "pre-set master" switch. Many boards of five pre-sets or ten pre-sets are now in use; the one in the Philadelphia Town Hall has sixteen. Except in a few very expensive installations, however, the pre-set feature does not include the dimmers, which must be set by hand for each scene. The pre-set merely switches on the desired circuits—though this may be a real timesaver in plays with many changes. Against these advantages should be mentioned the one serious fault of the remote-control board, which is the tendency of the contactors to get out of order, failing to work when the pilot switch is thrown, or working several seconds—or even minutes—late.

Most modern boards, except the console type, use a standardized form of switch. The contacts are made through spring prongs pushed against each other by a cam, which is operated through the panel by a toggle handle; tinkerers with radio sets are familiar with similar switches of smaller size; so are telephone operators. The toggle has three positions: up, down, and center (horizontal). The down position is the "hot" or "independent" position; that is, it throws the circuit on independently of other circuits—provided the dimmer on the same circuit is not in the "down," or dimmed, position. One of the commonest errors of the novice electrician is to throw a switch without noting the position of the dimmer, and then wonder why the lights do not go on. Another is to work the dimmer without first turning on the switch. The "hot" position is used for convenience in turning on any circuit experimentally when setting lights, or for setting any circuit which is to remain on when other lights are to be turned off—moonlight on a backdrop, for instance, when a character turns out the indoor lights. When the toggle is in the up position it does not bring the circuit on, but pre-sets it through the sub-master switch controlling that color group. When the sub-master is pushed down, it brings on all circuits in its group which have been pre-set in the up position. When it is pushed up, it pre-sets its group of circuits through the stage-main or master switch; and when that is pushed down all pre-set groups come on—again assuming that all dimmers are up. The dimmers, of course, may be pre-set at their desired positions, some full up, some at half, and so on, according to need. Thus, even

with a direct-control board, the first scene can be pre-set without wasting current, and turned on only at curtain time by means of the one master switch.

On a direct-control board, a switch in the center or horizontal position is off. On a remote-control board it is "pre-set"—that is, ready to operate with the pre-set masters. On a "five-pre-set" board there are five little flipper switches on each circuit panel. Flipping the first to the "on" position pre-sets that circuit for Scene One; flipping the second pre-sets it for Scene Two, and so on. Elsewhere on the board are five larger toggles known as "pre-set masters." To light Scene One, the first pre-set master is thrown, and every circuit having its first pre-set flipper in the "on" position lights up, provided its circuit switch is at center and its dimmer up—and provided its contactor works!

The flexibility of a lighting system depends not only upon its switches, but upon its dimmers. In many an expensive installation, a dimmer is permanently included in each lighting circuit. Where the lights are also permanently installed, this insures correct loading of the dimmer; but in the case of a circuit feeding a stage pocket it does not even do that, since any size or type of unit may be plugged into the pocket. The permanent dimmer does save the operator the trouble of changing dimmers about; but the system is unnecessarily expensive and wasteful, since it keeps many dimmers tied up and out of use much of the time. It almost never happens that all circuits on a large board are in use at once, or that all those in use require dimmers. If the dimmers are all independent and interchangeable, so that any dimmer may be plugged in on any circuit, not more than half as many dimmers as circuits will ordinarily be required. The resourceful little board in the theatre of the Players Club of Swarthmore, Pa., (Plate 32-c) has thirty-three stage circuits, and only fifteen dimmers (exclusive of the house-light dimmer); but in fourteen seasons only three or four productions have required them all. Apart from the greater economy of the interchangeable dimmers there is an advantage in operation, since all circuits that are dimmed at once can be placed on adjacent dimmers and worked more conveniently together, either with master handles or by hand. To insure against overloading, however, all interchangeable dimmers should be of the same capacity, and all circuits regularly loaded with the same number of

watts—unless the board provides an automatic balancing device to adjust the loads.

If each dimmer is designed to carry, let us say, 1000 watts, each circuit should be loaded with 1000 watts and no more; the load may consist of one 1000-watt olivette, or two 500-watt spots, or four 250-watt baby spots, or ten 100-watt bulbs in a strip or trough. If a circuit is underloaded—that is, with 750 or 800 watts—no great harm is done, except that the dimmer will not completely black it out; with the dimmer all the way down, there will still be some light. If the circuit is overloaded, however—1200 or 1500 watts—a great deal of harm will be done; the dimmer will overheat badly, and in time will burn out. It will also dim the lights too quickly, reaching a black-out when only part way down.

The value of mechanically interlocking dimmer handles and master handles is much less, artistically, than generally supposed. Amateur electricians, especially young ones, like to play with them; young technicians generally like to do things the hard way. Now and then master handles are useful for a sweeping change that must be made quickly, but must not, or cannot, be made instantly with a master switch. Otherwise they have more faults than advantages.

When a number of circuits are to be dimmed, it seldom happens that all the dimmers have the same initial setting. If all the handles are set to lock, and the master handle brought down, the circuits do not start dimming at the same time, or dim proportionately. Each clicks in as its position is reached—often with a loud and offensive noise. Once down, they cannot be brought back to their original positions with the master, but will all go up together. When a number of circuits are dimmed in unison, the loss of light at each contact point is multiplied by the number of circuits, and is therefore more noticeable; for a slow dimming, therefore, such as is used to suggest sunset and dusk, the individual dimmers, operated separately by hand, will give a slower, smoother effect. They will also permit more selective and artistic color control. For a quick black-out on a quiet scene the master is too noisy, producing a whole barrage of clicks; in a shouting scene it may be unobjectionable. An instantaneous black-out with the stage-main switch is ordinarily unpleasant because of the retinal image it leaves in the eyes of the audience, and

for that reason many directors insist upon the use of the master dimmer in spite of the noise. With a little skill and practice the electrician can effect a satisfactory compromise by quickly dimming two, or four, of the brightest circuits on adjacent handles, and cutting the stage-main just as they reach zero (or having an assistant cut it).

Most of the foregoing remarks refer to standard equipment, including the usual resistance-type dimmers, or rheostats. Just before World War II a good deal of progress had been made in the experimental development of lighting controls, including reactance dimmers of many types, auto-transformer dimmers, electrical (rather than mechanical) group masters, automatic loading devices, and the like. In a few years it seems likely that most of the present equipment will be replaced by smaller, lighter, more flexible, more foolproof, and (eventually) more inexpensive apparatus.<sup>8</sup> But it will be used in much the same manner, and with much the same artistic purposes and limitations.

The lighting units themselves have also developed rapidly in recent years, and will doubtless continue to do so. The arc light, formerly used in high-powered spots, has practically disappeared from the theatre—not to mention the still older calcium lights used for similar purposes. The concentrated filament tungsten lamp has proved better, and is more easily controlled. It is made in a great variety of sizes, shapes, and wattages for different types of spots, floods, and “olivettes,” and even for high-powered projectors. There have been many experiments in high-powered floodlighting—notably by Maude Adams; but there have also been many in the opposite direction, through the use of many small units, more easily handled and mounted, and more inexpensive to install or replace. The old-fashioned “bunch-light,” consisting of ten or twelve ordinary bulbs mounted close together in a reflector box, for floodlighting back stage, has largely disappeared in favor of the well-built olivette containing a single 500-watt or 1000-watt lamp. In very large theatres, still higher wattages are used. The old footlights consisting of rows of color-dipped bulbs have given way to boxed footlights with gelatine screens or glass color lenses; the latter have an advantage in permanency of color, the former have very little. Boxed footlights throw more noticeable shadows on the back drop than the old strips did,

<sup>8</sup> One of the most interesting pre-war installations of this type is at Allegheny College, where 34,000 watts are controlled on a very small, but flexible, board (Plate 32-b).

but do not smell of burning color shellac, and look neater and more expensive—as they are. Strip lights are still useful in portable form for lighting ground-rows, backings, and doorways, and are often found in second and third borders. Almost all theatres have eliminated them for the first or “concert” border, and have substituted a light bridge or pipe batten on which are mounted a large number of spots and floods of various types, to provide flexibility in direction, color, and intensity of lighting. Most of the larger floodlights are useful only as such, though well-designed for the purpose. But most border spots—especially “baby” spots—not only are variable in focus and angle, but have removable lenses so that they can also be used as floods. The Fresnelight type of spotlight provides a wide range of focus with soft edges; the Klieglight and Lekolite types have improved reflectors, hooded lenses to control spill, and diaphragms to control the size and shape of the spotted area (Fig. 30). A good modern outfit includes plenty of extra units, and plenty of mounting clamps of various styles, so that the lamps may be mounted anywhere—on battens, stands, balcony rails, or wherever they are needed. It also includes plenty of stage pockets connected with the switchboard, plenty of cables, and connectors.

The craze for abolishing footlights seems to have subsided; the present tendency is to use them chiefly for auxiliary lighting, with enough brilliancy to take the shadows from under the actors’ noses, but not enough to create shadows on the back drop or wall. In most theatres the first border and the footlights are so placed that an actor coming down stage too far loses the border lights and his face moves into shadow while his legs grow relatively brighter. To overcome this, most theatres now do a good deal of lighting with balcony spots, or with spots mounted in ceiling beams; and this has been a real improvement. Like everything else, it can be overdone, and if too much of the lighting comes from the center of a low balcony it tends to flatten the stage picture and spoil its plastic quality. For years Belasco and others spent time and energy adding lights in the effort to paint out all shadows and get full illumination everywhere; nowadays most producers try to get significant shadows and contrasts by using fewer and bolder light sources at more dramatic angles.

More than once in this book I have questioned the value of scenic elaboration; but the value of improvements in stage lighting is, I think,



unquestionable. Too much light exposes the inadequacy or tawdriness of the setting; but well-controlled light is the finest possible instrument of subordination, simplification, emphasis, and suggestion. It enables the director to indicate locality with a minimum of elaboration and expense. It helps him to control attention, and to balance the relation between foreground and background, and—most important of all—it helps him to suggest the mood. Too much ostentatious playing with lights can, of course, be as distracting as overelaboration of scenery; but whereas the tendency of nearly all scenic elaboration is to run competition with the actor, the tendency of a flexible, resourceful lighting system, controlled with artistry and restraint, is to support the actor against such competition.

In the quarrel scene of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as illustrated in Plate 21, there is an interesting problem in balance of emphasis. Oberon and Puck, whose mischief is responsible for the quarrel, are enjoying the fun, up stage center, and the audience can enjoy it the more for seeing them do so; but there is always danger that their antics will steal too much attention from the lovers themselves. In this production the electrician, with the director at his elbow, stood with one hand on the dimmer of the spotlight which lighted Puck and Oberon, and the other on the two adjacent dimmers controlling the lights on the four lovers; by watching the scene, "feeling" audience response,<sup>4</sup> and playing the dimmers very gently, he controlled the exact balance of emphasis—and did it a little differently for each different audience. Puck and Oberon, though at stage center, were always subordinated, but never blacked out; whenever they grew too active or drew too much attention, their light faded the least bit and the other lights came up. It could have been overdone, but was not; and that is the sort of thing that a flexible lighting system can accomplish quite unnoticed by the audience. If an example from a modern play is needed, one may be found in the final scene of *Letters to Lucerne* (Plate 29-a). Erna, the German girl, is reading the tragic letter that tells of her brother's death, but reconciles her to her Polish friend, Olga. The stage is fully lighted, but an extra soft-edge spot on Erna comes up slowly to intensify the light on her just enough for emphasis but not for notice. As she reaches the point in

<sup>4</sup> Every experienced actor, director, or prompter knows that audience response can be felt backstage with surprising sensitivity.

the letter at which a reaction is expected from Olga (seated at the head of the table, L.C.), the spread of light is just enough to include the latter, and the greatest intensity is reached at the instant when Olga jumps up and rushes into Erna's arms, as the curtain starts down.

Light can be unobtrusive because it is silent, and because in most cases we do not see the light itself, or even its source; we see only its effect upon the play. Sometimes we hardly notice even that, but in some mysterious, unconscious way we feel its emotional power, its almost magical spell. Luminosity has a fascination for us, an appeal to our sense of drama as well as to our sense of beauty. And this experience is greatly heightened by the skillful use of color.

#### COLOR IN STAGE LIGHTING

Those whose experience with colors has been confined to the mixing of pigments for painting have little conception, as a rule, of the problems involved in stage lighting. Lights and pigments do not mix in the same way at all. For example, red and blue pigments mixed together give purple, but a red light on a blue pigment gives black. Red and green lights mixed together give yellow light, but red and green pigments mixed together give a dirty brown. Blue and yellow pigments give a bright green, but blue light on a yellow dress kills its color to a dark greenish-blue-gray.

Theoretically, the visible spectrum includes an infinite number of color variations. Practically, the human eye is only sensitive to three colors of light: red, green, and violet; and all our color sensations are in terms of these three colors, singly, or in composition. They are known as the light primaries, or "additive" primaries—additive because the three kinds of light added together give the sensation of white.<sup>5</sup>

When a red glass or gelatine is used to screen a white light, its effect—provided, of course, it is a true primary red—is to suppress the green and violet rays and to let only the red through. When a green glass is used—a true primary green—its effect is to suppress the red and violet rays and let only the green through. If two screens are used together on one lamp, both of them true primary colors, they will not let

<sup>5</sup> Demonstrations of color mixture on motor-driven paper discs in the psychological laboratory have led some theorists to insist that our color sense includes more than three primary sensations. The confusion arises from the fact that this technique introduces another factor: the element of time, as expressed through retinal memory.

any light through; but if they are used on separate lamps, and the two colors directed at the same white surface (no other light being present), they will show a color different from either. Red and green rays, in equal proportions, will give yellow; green and violet will give blue; violet and red will give crimson. In other words, what we call yellow is simply the sensation of seeing red and green light simultaneously and indistinguishably, in the complete absence of violet light. What we call blue is the sensation of seeing green and violet light simultaneously; what we call crimson is the sensation of seeing violet and red light simultaneously.

A yellow pigment is a pigment which, in a white light—that is, a light made up of all three rays—has the peculiar property of absorbing the violet rays, and reflecting only the red and green. A blue pigment is one that absorbs the red rays, and reflects the green and violet. A crimson pigment is one that absorbs the green, and reflects the red and violet. These three colors, each of which absorbs one kind of light completely, are known as the pigment primaries, or “subtractive” primaries—subtractive because each subtracts one primary color from white light. They are also known as the complementaries of the light primaries, a complementary of any color being that other color which represents that portion of white light not in the first color.

When a light primary is played upon a pigment of its complementary color, it should be obvious that black will result—black being the complete absence of light. Since there is only one kind of light present, and the pigment is the one that reflects any other light but not that one, no light will be reflected. Thus a red light on a blue pigment shows black; a green light on a crimson pigment shows black; and a violet light on a yellow pigment shows black.

When a pure primary red light is played upon the stage, no green or violet rays being present, it is obvious that only red can be reflected. Different pigments, however, will reflect it with different intensities, the yellows, reds, and crimsons reflecting a great deal, and the blues little or none. This creates an illusion of white and black, and some of the books on color state that a red light on a red surface gives white, a red light on a green surface, gray, and a red light on a blue surface, black. In reality there is no white light present, nor any other color except red; but in the presence of a single primary color one loses his

sense of color discrimination, and sees only variations in intensity. When only green light is present, with no red or violet, one sees only light and dark green, and thinks of them as black and white; and when only violet light is present, he sees only light and dark violet. It is seldom possible, of course, to find sources of light or color screens that give true primary colors, or even to find pure pigment primaries, so that one seldom sees a perfect demonstration of these principles in the theatre. It is practically impossible to demonstrate them adequately on paper, and the accompanying color chart is merely a suggestive approximation.

On the chart I have tried to show the effect of red, green, and violet light, thrown separately on the primary pigments, and on various common mixtures of pigments; and also the effect of crimson light (a mixture of red and violet rays); of blue light (a mixture of green and violet rays); and of yellow light (a mixture of red and green rays). In spite of the inevitable inaccuracies in reproduction, this may be useful in suggesting the most serious pitfalls in color lighting. It will certainly show how completely a color may be blacked out by light of its complementary color, and how badly certain popular costume colors will fare in certain colors of light. Tilting the chart and looking along the vertical columns will help make the monochromatic effects clear.

The colors most often used in the older theatres, in addition to white, are red, blue, and amber. But the red is rather a crimson than a vermillion; it is more nearly the pigment primary than the light primary, but is not quite either. The blue is neither the violet of the light primary nor the clear cyanide blue of the pigment primary; it is a dark blue, perhaps half way between, and because it is usually darker, it gives less intensity of light from the same number of bulbs than the red or amber. The amber is much darker than the yellow of the pigment primary, and contains more red rays. The mixtures obtained with such impure colors are more accidental than scientific. For that reason there has been a tendency in the newer theatres to introduce color units as nearly like the primary red, green, and violet of light as possible, and when this can be done it is possible to mix and control the colors much more accurately, and with more widely varied effects. All color values, however, are upset by the use of dimmers, since the fairly white light of the tungsten filament changes progressively to yellow, orange, and orange-red as the light is dimmed.

Since a good violet light is hard to achieve, especially with equal wattage, the synthesis of blue from green and violet is not usually very successful. Nor is it especially useful; blue gelatines are easier to manage. The synthesis of crimson from red and violet is a little easier but only occasionally useful. But the synthesis of yellow from red and green is very successful and very useful. The yellow thus achieved is a clearer, livelier yellow than that given by the more familiar amber gelatines, and if the red and green lamps are kept well apart the yellow light is broken by the most interesting play of red and green shadows on uneven surfaces or moving actors. In a play of fantasy, like *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, red and green lighting gives a most interesting, colorful, and mysterious effect, especially in the night scenes. The overall effect is yellow, of whatever brilliancy one may desire, but the shadows are red and green. In less fantastic but still colorful costume plays, like *The Rivals* or *Twelfth Night*, the red and green lights at wide angles may be mixed with white, straw, or "surprise pink"; the result is a sparkle and brilliancy in the costumes, through the play of colored shadows, quite unobtainable with even lighting of one color. Even in a modern realistic play, the popular straw or amber lighting, so dull and lifeless by itself, is enormously improved by the use of a few red and green floods—possibly two of each—mounted in the first border and spaced far apart. When this device is used in moderation the audience is totally unconscious of it, yet very appreciative of the color interest and psychological liveliness of the total effect. Needless to say, the red and green must be kept in balance, and neither permitted to dominate any one area too obviously.

Footlights and borders are often equipped with glass color media. These have just one advantage: permanency in form and color. But the available color range is poor, and does not include even approximations of the light primaries. Gelatine color screens have a tendency to crack and buckle with the heat, and in some colors—notably the light blues, pinks, and lavenders, especially "surprise pink"—fade very quickly; consequently they must be renewed frequently. On the other hand they are relatively inexpensive, may be cut to any size and shape desired, and are available in a wide range of colors, including reds and greens that are very close to the primary hues. Improved plastic substitutes will doubt-

COLORS OF PIGMENT		COLORS OF LIGHT					
		RED	GREEN	VIOLET	RED AND VIOLET	GREEN AND VIOLET	RED AND GREEN
	BLUE						
	CRIMSON						
	YELLOW						
	GREEN						
	RED						
	VIOLET						
	ORANGE						
	BLUE-GREEN						
	PURPLE						

EFFECTS OF COLORED LIGHTS ON COLORED PIGMENTS



less replace them in time, with more resistance to heat and fading; until they do, gelatines will continue to serve the theatre well.

### THE ÆSTHETICS OF COLOR

Every director should know something about the æsthetics, as well as the physics, of color. There are two approaches to this study. One, the psychological, is based largely on the idea that color affects us associatively; that red is exciting because it is the color of blood and the symbol of danger; that blue is pleasing because it is the color of the clear sky, and green because it is the color of living vegetation; that black is the color of night, and fear, and sadness; yellow the jaundiced color, and so on. Such associations are inescapable, and there is a great deal of truth in color psychology; but its importance has been somewhat exaggerated, and some writers have indulged in rather far-fetched attempts to establish a mood for every color, and a color for every mood. Nevertheless the drama furnishes many opportunities for associative color symbolism.

In the Chinese theatre, color symbolism has been so long established and so uniform that it is part of the language of the stage. Some of this tradition is briefly explained in the program notes for *The Yellow Jacket* reprinted in the Appendix of this book (page 399).

The other approach is more directly scientific, and is based on the theory of color itself. It is admirably explained and illustrated by Michel Jacobs in his book on *The Art of Color*.

For the study of color harmonies and contrasts it is convenient to arrange the three primary colors and their opposites, or complementaries, in the form of a wheel (Fig. 29), and to indicate the intermediate colors by subdivision. A color wheel of twenty-four hues is adequate for most purposes. Unfortunately there is much confusion and disagreement in respect to color terminology. The word "red," for example, means different things to different people, or to the same person at different times. Some writers on painting say that the primary colors—meaning the pigment, or subtractive primaries—are red, yellow, and blue, and their complementaries orange, green, and purple (some even say red, green, and blue). The important thing is not the terminology, but a clear conception of what the primary hues really are like. The red of the additive or light primary is not a purplish red or crimson; it is slightly on the



orange side of scarlet. But it is by no means orange, as that term is generally understood. The color known as cadmium red is fairly close to it. For practical stage purposes the gelatine sold as "fire red" behaves pretty well as an additive primary. The primary green is slightly on the yellow-green side rather than the blue-green, but by no means as yellow

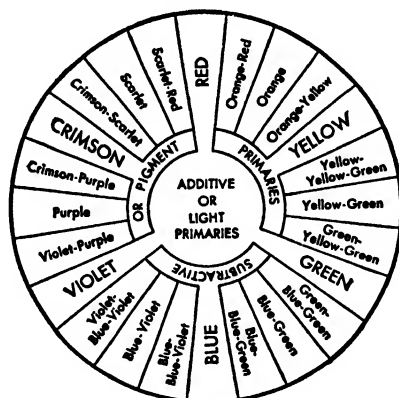


FIG. 29. COLOR WHEEL.

as generally implied by the term yellow-green. The gelatine sold as "medium green" is the nearest one commonly available. The primary violet is not as dark as the word purple would imply; it is on the blue side of purple rather than the red side, but is quite distinctly violet rather than blue. No available gelatine comes very close to it; the one sold as "violet" is a little too blue, and the one sold as "light purple" is a little too red. All gelatines let too much white light through to function as perfect light primaries. Of the pigment primaries, the yellow is close to cadmium yellow; it is less green than a lemon yellow, less red than an orange-yellow. The blue is close to a cobalt blue; it is not as light as cerulean or sky blue, but is similar in hue, and gives a close approximation of cerulean if tinted out with white. The pigment primary crimson—which some insist upon calling "red"—is a rosy or purplish red, on the blue side of scarlet, not the orange side. Perhaps the best way to get these colors clearly in mind is to study the color wheel as a whole, adjusting the terminology to one's own concepts.

The basic law of color appreciation is very simple. Color harmony is obtained by the use of adjacent, or nearly adjacent, hues, as they appear on the wheel. Color contrast is obtained by the use of opposite colors.

Both harmonies and contrasts are pleasing, if used in proper proportion, but there is a difference between a contrast and a *clash*. Colors approximately ninety degrees apart on the color wheel give the most painful clashes.

Unmodified hues, either in contrast or in harmony, are crude and barbaric, though effective enough for certain purposes. For more subtle contrasts and harmonies the painter uses neutralized or partly neutralized colors. A neutralized color is one with which a portion of its complementary has been mixed; a little of the complementary softens it and makes it less garish; a little more darkens it; and a fifty-fifty mixture blacks it out. Colors can also be softened by tinting—that is, by lightening them off with white; or they can be both neutralized and tinted at the same time. The best painters use no black paint, depending for their darker effects upon neutralized colors.

Some of the most beautiful color effects are obtained by using two or three adjacent or harmonious colors, each partly neutralized, together with the complementary of the middle color, also partly neutralized; or if two basic colors are used, the complementary may be a “split” complementary—that is, a color between the complementaries of the two basic colors.

In considering the psychological effect of color, the director should remember that there are certain associations connected with the theatre itself which are especially apt to influence an audience. Real moonlight is yellow, but in the theatre moonlight has been blue for so many years that we should not recognize it in any other color. Amber light outdoors, in the daytime, often seems ominous, foretelling a strange, sudden storm; but amber light on the stage is taken to symbolize happy sunshine or the cheerful glow of indoor lamps. There is plenty of opportunity in the theatre to use color for visual beauty, but director and designer must never forget that the important thing is not what we actually see but what it does to our imaginations through suggestion.

#### OPERATING RHYTHMS

Few beginners in theatre work, and few theatre-goers, realize the importance of timing and cadence in the coordination of light, music, and curtain. A good overture, whether played “live” or from recordings, is a great build-up for audience attitude; but its effect can be ruined if the

electrician dims the house lights too quickly or too slowly, or gets them out too soon. The most effective speed varies with the type of play, the character of the overture, and the mood of the audience; the foots should ordinarily go up before the house is dark, even if they are to be dimmed just at curtain time. The house should be dimmed slowly, at such a rate as to build up the maximum hush of expectancy just as the overture ends and the curtain goes up. A little too much hurry catches the audience unprepared; a little too much delay after the house is dark causes the built-up attention to collapse. In multi-scene plays with quick changes, music is very effective to cover the waits. The house should remain dark, or only dimly lighted, but the foots should be on to nurse expectancy. If cover music is used it may start very softly a few lines before the end of a scene (never loudly enough to distract attention), and swell up quickly after the curtain line is spoken. A light fade-out may be used instead of the curtain, or just before the curtain falls; in that case the music should fade up as the lights fade out. When the next scene is ready the rhythm is reversed. The music may fade down as the curtain goes up; or the footlights may first fade out, the curtain go up in darkness, and the lights fade up as the music fades down. Faint music may continue for a few seconds overlapping the lines, but so softly that its final fading passes unnoticed. After the final curtain of the play, the house lights should not come up too suddenly—especially if there are tears and red noses in the audience; and the foots should not fade out until the house lights are at least half up.

It would be impossible in a book of this size to cover all the details and complications of back-stage mechanics, even if everything else were excluded. There are now so many kinds of theatres, with so many kinds of equipment at their service, that the chief danger is over-elaboration. If I seem to have given undue space to stage lighting, it is because good lighting is the soul of good stagecraft, and the one element of modern elaboration that seems to work on the side of simplicity and restraint rather than distraction.

So far, I have tried to sketch the major problems of stagecraft in a general way. It remains to consider some of the special problems of amateur groups who must make do with small budgets, cramped quarters, and badly designed or inadequate equipment.



## *Amateur Stagecraft*

AMONG the questions most often asked by amateurs, apart from the thousand-and-one technical queries on how to do this and how to make that, are such long-range questions of policy as the following:

1. How can we spend our limited means to achieve the best results with the least waste?
2. If we have to rent a place to play, and have a choice of several unsuitable buildings, what considerations should govern our choice?
3. If we later have a little money to build or remodel, what mistakes should we try to avoid?
4. If we are just starting, with no scenery or lighting equipment, what do we need first? In what order shall we plan to add other items?

It will be the aim of this chapter to suggest answers to these questions, and perhaps to some of the more detailed ones; also to some that are not often asked but ought to be. There will be no attempt to give complete instructions for scene building, scene painting, costuming, make-up, and back-stage effects; but a few useful methods not so generally known will be mentioned, a few common errors pointed out, and a few knotty problems discussed.

### A PLACE TO PLAY

The first question is obviously too general for a single answer; it really includes the other three and may best be answered through them.

The second can be at least partly answered. Few organizations start with enough money to build or buy a playhouse, however small, or even to remodel one. The alternative is to play in a rented place, and sometimes there is no choice about it, only one place being available. But if there is a choice, the following considerations may help decide it:

First of all, beyond basic considerations of safety and reasonable comfort, it is not the seating space but the playing space that is important. An

attractive, well-decorated auditorium, with comfortable seats, may be highly desirable, but it is not essential, and without a good playing space it is useless. Too large an auditorium may offer difficulties in acoustics and in visibility, and may be too hard to fill; a small one will necessitate more performances of each play, but that is no disadvantage except in the matter of royalty rates. To the actors it is an advantage, since it gives them more chance to polish and perfect each play, and that is the way to learn. A small audience is not necessarily a discouragement; ninety-eight people in ninety-nine seats are more responsive, and feel to the actor like a larger audience, than a hundred and ninety-eight in five hundred seats. Even five hundred people feel like a tiny, timid, cold audience in a house with fifteen hundred seats. A sloping floor is better than a level one; a smoking room and lounge are desirable; clean washrooms are almost necessary, and should, if possible, be soundproof. But perfection in these things is not essential to good plays, and will not insure good plays. It is the playing space that counts.

The playing space need not be a permanent stage, designed and built for the purpose. Far more essential is adequate space, and freedom to use it in any way desired. The Penthouse Theatre, though it now has its own building, originated in a rented penthouse apartment where there was no regular stage and no room to build one. An auditorium with a large, bare platform is preferable to one with a small, cramped stage, boxed in with solid walls and low ceiling—no matter how beautifully designed and decorated for club meetings, lectures, and piano recitals. On such a stage no type of standard scenery can be used. For interior scenes the tenant must either leave the architectural stage unaltered, relying on furnishings alone, or devise a box set with special methods of lashing and bracing, in a special size, with a special method of handling the ceiling; and if it is to be set up or struck during the play he must work under exasperating difficulties. For exterior scenes he is practically limited to a "wood-wing" set, too small to be convincing, with a sky drop hung on the back wall, narrow wing flats so close to the side walls that most of the exits between them are blocked off, and a couple of stringy foliage borders hanging from the low ceiling and brushing the actors' heads. Nine times out of ten the owners will not permit nails or screws in their precious woodwork, including the hardwood floor. There is seldom any means of getting bulky scenery or properties on or off such a stage with

the curtain down, or any place to store them off stage. Money spent for scenery under such conditions is largely wasted if the group later moves into larger and better quarters.

The best advice I can give, therefore, on a choice of quarters, is not to be tempted by a small box stage, even though it looks very neat and attractive when furnished for a lecture, has a nice velour draw-curtain, a row of footlights, a panel of switches and fuses (flatteringly called a "switchboard"), and two nicely furnished "dressing rooms" off right and left, which cannot be used as dressing rooms because they must be used as the wings of the stage. If there is nothing else available, that is another matter. When a group is forced to use such a stage, some of the worst problems can be side-stepped or solved, and some hints on the subject will be given later in this chapter. But it is better to rent a barn.

There is no objection to a stage, of course, or even to a proscenium opening with a curtain, provided that it is not boxed in. If there is adequate space behind the proscenium, above, on either side, and at the rear, with a softwood floor, and liberty to attach needed rigging with nails or screws, that is just fine. Absence of equipment, at the start, is much less serious than the presence of badly designed equipment. On a bare stage, with or without a proscenium frame, it is possible to begin with the simplest items, adding others from time to time as box-office returns justify them. With planning and forethought, it is possible to minimize waste, and to buy chiefly items that can be used (with or without alterations) in subsequent productions; and since they do not have to be designed for an odd, queer, cramped situation, they can be of standard sizes and types, usable in any standard theatre or on any other equally roomy bare stage or platform. When it comes time to move to a better location or build a new one, very little equipment has to be scrapped or left behind.

A well-chosen first play can be given with simplicity and good taste, before a simple drapery background, with borrowed furniture and properties; it can be surprisingly well lighted with two convertible spotlights used as floods, each equipped with a portable dimmer, a stand, a gelatine frame, and plenty of cable. Placed frankly on either side of the audience, and directed at the acting area from different angles, with the dimmers back stage or back of the audience, they give fair illumination, a suggestion of theatrical glamour, and considerable range of intensity;

they may be used together, or in alternation, or with varying balance, and they may even be used for black-outs in lieu of a curtain. Their color can be changed only by a visible operator, but that is not too disturbing, especially if done between acts. If no drapery is available or there is no place to hang it, simple screens may be used, like those commonly found in hotels and restaurants (and possibly borrowed from one); or the two lights can be used for "space stage" effect on a bare platform, or in a central arena; for that purpose they are best mounted high on the walls, or on ceiling beams. Such equipment will always be useful no matter how much is later added; even the portable dimmers are worth having as auxiliary equipment in a standard theatre with adequate switchboard.

In other words, two considerations should govern the choice of a temporary home: plenty of playing space—including storage, workshop, and dressing-room space—and freedom to use it without too many restrictions. Everything else can be developed gradually, and the group will thrive all the better in the satisfaction of slow but creative growth.

#### BUILDING A PLAYHOUSE

Since relatively few community theatres (and still fewer amateur clubs) own their own theatres, and since the few better-known ones have partly subsidized plants costing upwards of half a million dollars, there is a disposition among amateurs to regard a home of their own as a fantastic dream. State universities and city high schools, with public treasuries behind them, are building some beautiful theatres, lavishly equipped, and at very high costs; but ordinary little-theatre groups are largely condemned to play in rented quarters. Some are lucky enough to rent fairly adequate theatres; some have been successful in remodeling clubhouses, town halls, or barns; few feel that they could afford to build.

In the hope of suggesting some plans and economies that might make this adventure possible for more community groups, I wish to cite the experience of an organization with which I happen to have been associated for more than thirty years: The Players Club of Swarthmore, Pennsylvania. It is a strictly amateur community group which has had its own theatre since 1932—a comfortable, workable little theatre, seating 320 persons (see Plate 25). The stage is 50 by 25 feet, with a proscenium opening 26 by 16 feet, and a gridiron height of 38 feet. There are twelve

dressing rooms, a combined workshop and green-room with a balcony for the make-up crew, and an adequate lighting system. There is a club-room over the lobby, with a kitchenette; there are small but neat wash-rooms, and a box office. The building conforms to all the rigid requirements of the state and of the underwriters covering safety devices, emergency lights, sprinkler system, asbestos curtain, fire doors, and the like. Yet it was built at an actual cost of \$39,000, exclusive of the land. Costs were low, of course, in 1931-32, and recent underwriters' appraisals set the replacement value at \$72,000; but that valuation includes a large external storage shed and a number of minor improvements which have been added since. Even \$72,000 is far short of half a million; and an organization that has saved a few thousands and established good credit and reputation in a stable community should have little difficulty in financing such a venture.

The Swarthmore activity began with a loosely organized minstrel show in 1911. It developed slowly but steadily as a private club with a lively community spirit, playing for the first twenty years in rented quarters, always spending less than its income and accumulating a small stock of equipment, largely portable. In 1931 it had \$10,000 in savings, and a vague, timid longing for a clubhouse of its own. Then one generous member donated a small plot of ground on the edge of town, and the Board of Governors decided to seize the opportunity offered by depression prices and take the gamble. A bank took the first mortgage, small loans were raised from many members on a certificate basis, and the savings did the rest. Income increased rapidly in the new theatre, and obligations have been steadily reduced; the first mortgage would have been retired in ten years had it not been partly refinanced to cover the purchase of adjoining land on both sides for parking space and protection of investment. The organization is still a club, with a limit of one thousand members; active and non-active have equal rights and pay equal dues. Nobody is paid but the janitor. Eight major productions are given each year, each with a different member-director. Each plays five performances to an audience of 1200 to 1500 members and guests, in a town of less than 5000 population. Dues are \$7 per year. All of which proves that it can be done.

It can be done, however, only with skillful planning. To build a really satisfactory little theatre at a moderate cost, it is necessary to re-



frain from wasting money on attractive unessentials, and to scheme carefully for the provision of essentials in the simplest possible way.

For a theatre of this size, whether operated privately or for gain, most states now have very strict building laws and rules covering safety equipment. Most of these laws and rules are wise ones, very much in the interest of the members themselves as well as their guests and patrons. The equipment required under such laws must be set down as essential costs. Nevertheless there are perfectly safe and legal ways of escaping certain requirements by omitting from the plans the dangerous situations which the requirements are prescribed to correct. For example, many states now require expensive steel beams to support an auditorium floor, so that it cannot collapse and drop the audience into the basement. But the Swarthmore playhouse has no basement; the auditorium floor is of thick concrete on solid earth. So the law is satisfied and thousands of dollars saved—not only the cost of the floor beams but that of thicker, deeper side walls to support them. There is a similar saving in the omission of excavation under the stage, except for a small furnace room under one end; this involves the sacrifice of traps, and the original plan was to spend another \$1000 later for a small excavation under the center of the stage, with an outlet in the workshop to provide a small trapped area clear of the side foundations. But in thirteen years the lack of traps has been an annoyance in only two or three plays, and in each case satisfactory evasive tactics were devised; so the improvement has been deferred in favor of more urgent ones—especially storage space. A major saving in cost was also achieved through the sacrifice of a conventional gridiron, with headroom above. The grid sheaves are mounted directly on the steel roof beams of the stage-house. The only disadvantage of this arrangement is that when a sheave must be repaired or a line rethreaded through it, a crewman must be hauled up on adjoining lines in a bosun's chair. The saving is not only the considerable cost of a gridiron (which would also have to meet safety requirements for a heavy load), but the tremendous cost of thicker walls and deeper foundations, required under the law for a building over 40 feet high. The present height of 38 feet comes within the legal and safe limit; if the grid were 38 feet and the roof higher it would not. But 38 feet is the minimum satisfactory height for a stage of this size.

Other economies can be effected—and were in this case—by unusually

simple wall and roof construction, plain finish, omission of all decorative elements, and of some minor installations not immediately needed. For example, all twelve of the Swarthmore dressing rooms are piped for washstands, but only the six in the first tier had the plumbing fixtures installed. The switchboard controls outlets for three rows of border lights, but only the first and third were actually installed. The second was left for later addition; but it has never been needed, and eventually the outlet may be used for something else—possibly some balcony spots.

With a limited building fund it is necessary, of course, to forego some very desirable features, and it is wise to design the plant in such a way as to make their later addition possible. In Swarthmore we have sometimes wished we had traps and a gridiron, but have never regretted the decision to omit them in the interest of major economy. We have never regretted the omission of items not needed at first, many of which have been subsequently added. If we had it to do over again with the same need of economy the only mistake we would try to correct would be in the dimensions of the stage; we would gladly trade a few of the initial refinements we did have for another six feet of depth, and a little more wing space on each side—improvements that would now be prohibitive in cost.

So—with a new building, as with a rented one—the most important consideration from every angle is adequate space.<sup>1</sup>

#### INITIAL EQUIPMENT

Perhaps the most important—certainly the most frequent—of the questions asked by amateurs is: If we are just starting, with no scenery or lighting equipment, what do we need first? In what order shall we plan to add other items?

As suggested earlier, two spotlights, convertible for use as floods, with two portable dimmers and accessories, should be the very first purchase, for use with a simple drapery or with borrowed screens. What comes next depends upon the size, shape, and arrangement of the actual stage. Roughly, there are three possible arrangements, each calling for a slightly different program: the arena, the open platform, and the proscenium stage.

<sup>1</sup> In *Theatre Arts* for January, 1939, will be found a symposium of advice on theatre design.

## THE ARENA STAGE

If there is no available stage at all, and the arena, or Penthouse, method is to be used, no scenery, in the ordinary sense, will be required. One or two low screens might conceivably be useful; and perhaps in time a few small platforms and steps, so designed as to be usable in various combinations as pedestals or bases for sculptural groupings of characters. They should be very plain, canvas covered over a thin padding, and made in even multiples of the smallest unit. Steps may be 8 inches high and either 10 or 12 inches deep (the latter preferable for ease and for formal effect); they may be made in lengths of 2, 3, 4, and 6 feet. Platforms may be made in heights of 8, 16, 24, and 32 inches; in depths of 24 and 36 inches; and in lengths of 4 and 6 feet. The larger platforms may be made of collapsible "parallels" and detachable treads, for easier storage. Units of the kind can be added one or two at a time as needed, and very few will be needed for arena production; but if well made to a preconceived scale they will always be adaptable for use on any kind of stage, with almost any kind of scenery, and they can be matched up later with larger platforms, ramps, arches, walls and pylons.

The chief need for arena production, apart from costumes, properties, and furniture, will be gradual additions to the lighting equipment. No regular footlights or borders will be used, and probably no strip lights. Two more spotlights—usable either as spots or as floods—are recommended as the first addition to the original two. If funds are lacking for a control board, they should have their own dimmers, or one double-capacity dimmer for the two, which would enable one operator to handle two lights at once. With four such lights of 500 watts each, two 500-watt dimmers, and one 1000-watt dimmer, a good deal of experimenting can be done. It is advisable to go slow on further expenditure until the results of such experimenting are fairly clear. The placing of lights for arena work requires study, and depends upon many factors—ceiling height; presence or absence of balconies; ceiling beams, etc.; area of floor and placing of audience; facilities for mounting lights, and so on. Most of the lights must be high for this kind of production; a low light, aimed at an actor, spills into the faces of the audience on the opposite side. Regular floodlights have too wide a spread to be useful here, and cannot be converted into spots, while most spots can be focused for use

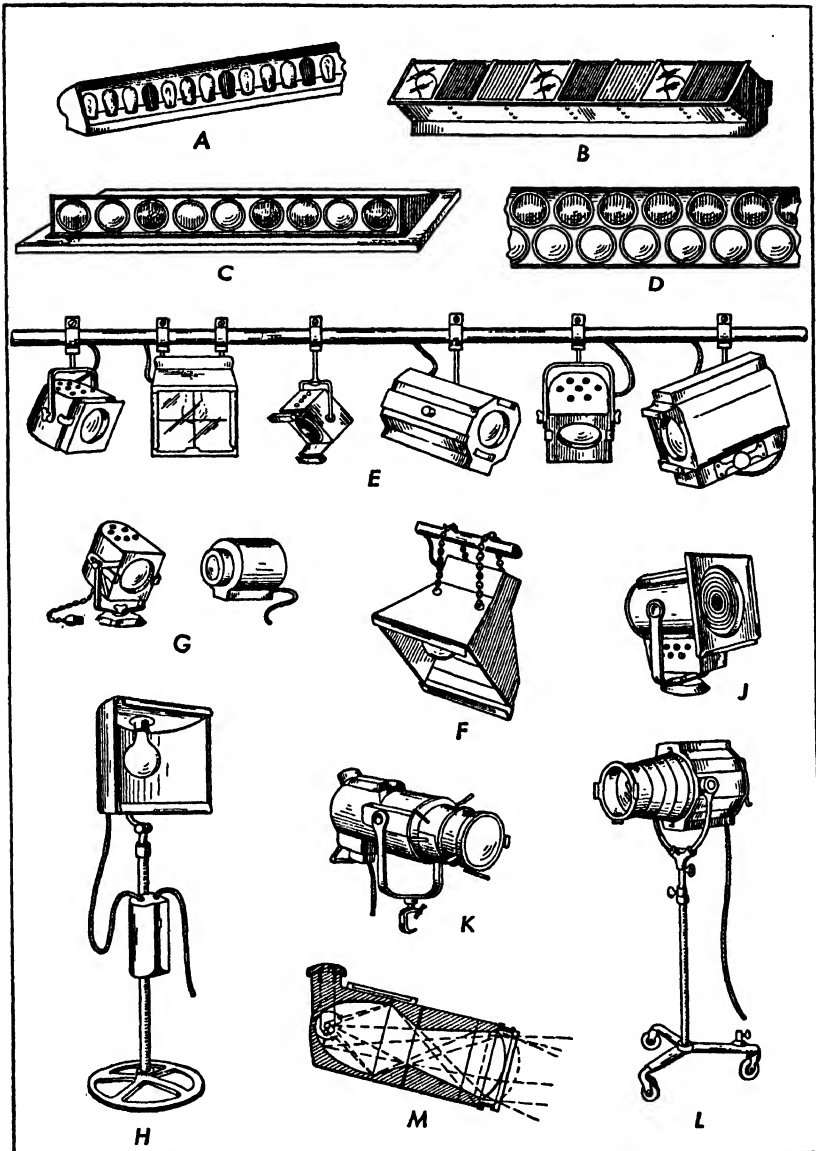


FIG. 30. STAGE LIGHTING UNITS.

A, strip footlights; B, square boxed foots; C, round boxed foots (disappearing type); D, round boxed foots, banked close; E, part of a concert border of spots and floods; F, a hanging floodlight; G, typical baby spots; H, a floodlight or olivette on a floor stand, with separate dimmer; J, a baby spot with fresnel type of lens; K and L, hooded spots (Lekolite and Klieg-light), with ellipsoidal reflectors; M, diagram of ellipsoidal reflector.

as floods, if necessary, or used without their lenses. If the spots are too sharp, they may be softened by stippling the edges of the lenses with dots of black lacquer. The "fresnel" type of lens, now used in many spots, gives good concentration with fairly soft edges. Experimentation will be easier if the lights are so placed that operators can reach them and manipulate them, controlling direction and changing color screens. In a ballroom with balconies on opposite sides it is possible to light an arena production reasonably well with four spots, two on each balcony, each

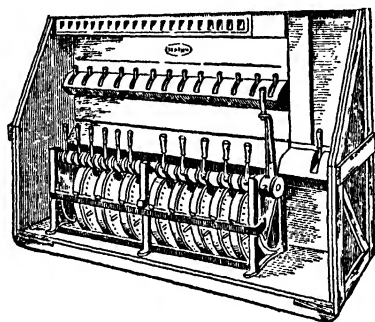


FIG. 31. PIANO-CASE DIMMERS.

with an operator. It is even possible to do some following of the characters as they move about; but the operator must be careful to keep his light out of the eyes of the audience.

Eventually, of course, more lights will be needed, and some sort of switchboard for centralized control. Unless the organization owns the building or expects to use it permanently it would certainly be foolish to install a built-in switchboard. For much less money it is possible to buy a portable switchboard and bank of dimmers of the "piano-case" type, with connector cables which permit any dimmer to be plugged in on any circuit (Fig. 31). They come in different sizes; and if the first bank eventually proves inadequate, a second bank can be added when funds permit. They can be connected to lighting circuits wired into the building, or used solely with portable lights fed by portable cables. They are unsightly, but can usually be kept out of sight; and the whole outfit—switchboard, dimmer banks, cables, and lights—can be packed up and moved to a new home on a few hours' notice. And they will never be wasted because they can be used on any kind of stage, in place of a regular switchboard or as supplementary equipment.

It is a good plan to figure ahead on the wattage to be used. For little-theatre work in general the 1000-watt circuit and the 1000-watt dimmer are best. The 500-watt spots can always be used in pairs on such circuits, and are very useful rigged that way. Two 400-watt spots can also be used, but will not dim out perfectly. When more emphasis is needed, a 1000-watt spot can be used separately; higher-wattage units are seldom needed in small theatres. The original 500-watt dimmers will still be useful for controlling single units; but of course they must never be used with the 1000-watt lamp.

One other type of equipment can be very useful in arena lighting, as in regular stage lighting. That is the self-contained reflector bulb, sold widely for spotlighting in store windows, and now very popular. It is relatively low-powered (usually 150 or 250 watts) and inexpensive, can be mounted on several different types of brackets in all sorts of odd places, and may be operated on the dimmers if connected in groups adding up to the proper wattages. Lamps of this type also lend themselves to use in homemade stovepipe spots, which are light enough to be mounted on homemade brackets almost anywhere, and which are very effective for controlling direction and preventing spill. As with all other items so far mentioned, they can be equally useful later in a more pretentious theatre with platform or proscenium stage.

#### THE PLATFORM STAGE

Turning now to the second possibility—a platform stage without a proscenium—we see that much of the same initial lighting equipment will serve. The placing of the lights will be different, but they may well be purchased in about the same order. Two additional items may sooner or later be found useful: a few strip lights and a few larger floods. The strip lights in portable troughs may be used as temporary footlights; and if later moved to a theatre with built-in footlights, they will still be useful for other purposes. Each trough should contain enough lamps to operate satisfactorily on an available dimmer. Whether the larger floods will be needed depends on the size and design of the settings to be acquired. Their most likely use is as olivettes, on stands, back stage; but they may occasionally be useful for overhead flooding. They should not be bought until really needed; for most floodlighting the baby spots with lenses removed will do. Before too many of these are acquired,

however, it is well to vary the types, and especially to include some of the newer hooded spots, of the Klieglight or Lekolite type, which permit very accurate control in the size and shape of the spotted area, with very little spill (see Fig. 30).

Unless the platform stage is to be treated as a bare platform—in which case the problem will be much like that of an arena—it will require some kind of scenic background. If it is a large platform, with room for wing space as well as acting area, some sort of masking may be desirable to conceal the wings. The first question to be decided is whether to build a proscenium frame—either semi-permanent or removable for storage—or to accept the platform arrangement frankly, ignore the space above, and treat the stage as one would an outdoor stage. If the occupancy is to be temporary, I recommend the latter plan.

When no attempt is made to arch the stage with a proscenium, to hang borders or rig ceiling pieces, the audience remains surprisingly uncurious as to the upper regions. The background may consist of draperies hung on the back wall (or on wires stretched across the stage), or of simple screens, plain, or decoratively painted (Plate 26), or of stylized flats designed for the play and cut off at the top with some architectural contour (Plates 18-a, 30, and 31), or of perfectly realistic wall flats without any ceiling piece (Plate 5-b); the flats or screens may be used in front of a dark drapery. For outdoor scenes the draperies may form a background for a few conventionalized flats symbolizing trees, bushes, walls, or exteriors of houses (Plates 21, 30-a, and 30-b). In any case it is important that the light be largely concentrated on the acting area, and not allowed to spill out into the wings or over the tops of the screens or flats; on the realistic flats it should, as far as possible, be kept away from the upper edges (Plate 5-b).

All of these elements are relatively inexpensive, and—with the exception of the highly stylized flats—may be used over and over, with occasional changes of color or design; and they may be used very effectively later in a regular theatre with proscenium stage, against a black cloth cyclorama. The simple screens illustrated in Plates 26-a and 26-b have been repainted and used in many colorful plays for children. Even the stylized flats may be repainted; but if the top contour is a conspicuous part of the stylization (as in Plate 30), they are hardly usable again unless for a very similar play, though the materials can be partly salvaged. Screens

and small flats are best made of beaverboard with 1" x 2" or 1" x 3" battens to stiffen them; beaverboard can easily be cut in irregular profile (as in Plates 21 and 30), and salvaged pieces are always useful, as are the battens. Full-sized flats, whether painted realistically or not, are best made of wood and canvas (or scene linen) in the standard way, and in sizes

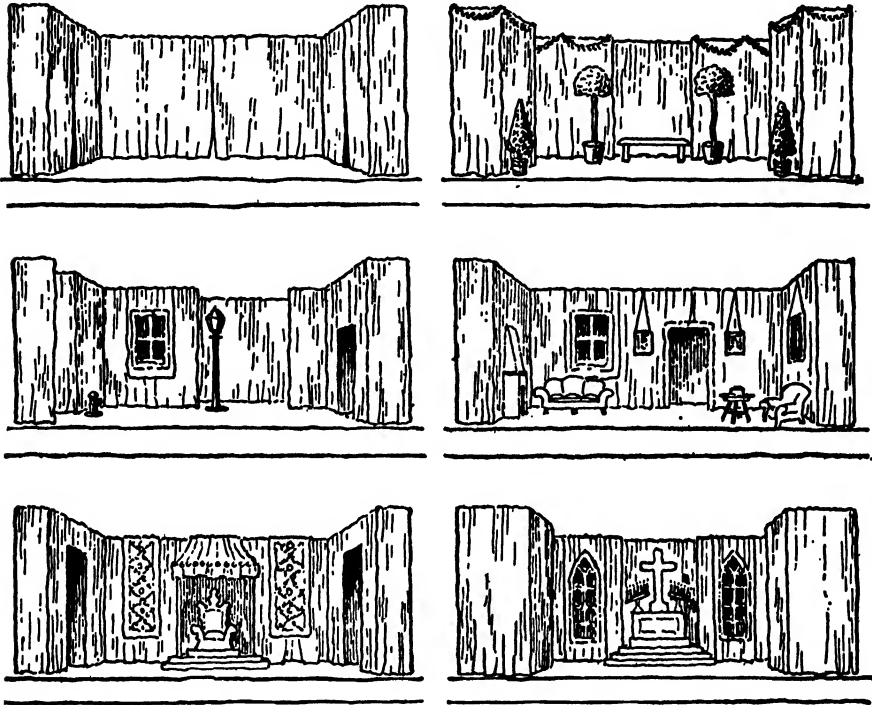


FIG. 32. ARRAS SETTINGS.

Suggesting the many different effects attainable with simple units.

that will later be useful for more elaborate box settings if the organization moves to a proscenium stage. A height of 10 feet is adequate for the open-platform technique, but 12 feet would be more useful later for anything but a very small stage. The best widths are 3, 4, and 6 feet; later a few 1-foot and 2-foot "jogs" may be desirable. The commercial theatre uses 5 feet 9 inches as maximum width, because of the limitations of baggage-car doors on the road; but for a local or community theatre the widths mentioned are more satisfactory.

If a curtain is desired for ceiling-less sets on a platform stage, a simple draw curtain may be rigged on a tight wire. It should be operated by



two stagehands rather than by draw cords, since anything more than a single wire is apt to call attention to the absence of a proscenium and a ceiling; even a single wire can do that if caught by the light. This is a constant problem in outdoor theatres, and has led most directors of such theatres to use black-outs rather than curtains. In general, the type of stage we have been discussing presents much the same problems as an outdoor stage—except as to the weather.

For an organization that expects to work for a long time on a large platform stage with no proscenium, there are some advantages in the so-called "arras stage." This is simply a semi-permanent setting of neutral draperies, and may, of course, be used on a proscenium stage as well. Some of its possibilities, when used with variable properties, and without a ceiling, are illustrated in Fig. 32. It may be supported on a series of wires stretched across the stage, or on a framework of pipes; the latter system is more easily set up and taken down, but is more expensive. The arras set may be used without a curtain, or with a draw curtain on a wire or pipe, and a narrow valance to screen the latter—but with the disadvantage already mentioned. An arras set made to be used without ceiling or masking borders is not likely to be high enough for subsequent use on a regular proscenium stage; nor will the wires or pipe framework be very useful. The system is not recommended, therefore, as an economical transition from platform stage to standard theatre.

### THE PROSCENIUM STAGE

The third and last possibility for the beginning group is the opportunity to start in something like a real theatre—something at least with reasonable stage space, a proscenium, and a curtain. In such quarters it is possible to plan ahead almost as if the group were starting its own well-designed theatre, but without initial equipment.

If funds are very scarce, the starting point may be about the same as for the other two arrangements, except that the background draperies, with whatever rigging is needed to hang them, will be more urgently needed at the start to conceal the back wall—always more offensive seen through a proscenium than as a natural background for an open platform. The first important purchase should *not* be a box setting, but a good set of drapes, generous as to height—from 4 to 6 feet higher than the proscenium opening—and including enough sections to hang with

fullness either in a wing-and-drop arrangement or as a cyclorama (Fig. 33). For a 26-foot stage, two 16-foot widths and four 12-foot widths will do quite well. Two or three borders of the same material will be needed for masking the flies. The drapes should be well made for best economy, but do not have to be of the most expensive materials; duvetine is almost as good as velour (better in some respects) and costs far less.

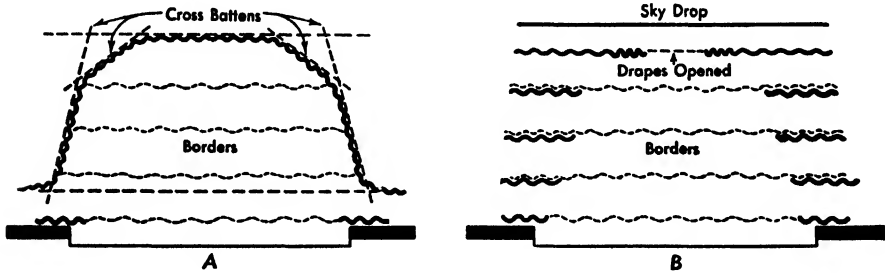


FIG. 33. PLANS FOR HANGING DRAPES.

For space-stage effects a black cloth cyclorama may be hung as shown at A; curved battens are a nuisance; it is better to use two strong main battens, with cross battens lashed on, as shown. If the cyclorama is high enough, some or all of the borders may be unnecessary. B shows the drapes hung as legs, with back drapes that may be opened to show a sky drop.

If only one set of drapes can be purchased at first, I cannot too strongly recommend that they be black—not gray, as most architects would suggest, but black.

Soft gray curtains, especially if made of rich material, are pleasing to the eye when seen once, and are quite satisfactory as a formal background for simplified realism in furniture and properties. They can be varied a little with tapestries, panels, doors, windows, and so on (as in Fig. 32); and they take lights well. But after repeated use they become much more insistently monotonous than the black; and because they take the lights almost too well they are more distracting as background for screens, flats, or unit settings. They do not have the complete neutrality, the power to reject attention and discourage curiosity, characteristic of the black. For spotlighted space-stage techniques they are not nearly as good as the black.

A black cloth cyclorama is the best initial purchase because it lends itself to more varied uses at less expense than any other one type of setting; because it can easily be modified later by the addition of a few pieces of

drapery in other colors; and because it is the best basis for any plan of simplification in any style or mode. It can be used alone as the background for pure space-stage effects with the aid of a spotlight on actors and furniture (Plate 5, insert). It is a less obtrusive background than the theatre wall for set-less plays like *Our Town*. It is the best background for simplified realism achieved with a few flats or screens (Plate 5-b), and can be used that way with any flats, from any set, whenever simplification is desired. It is the most suitable background for decoratively painted screens used formally (as in Plate 26), or for frankly stylized unit settings (like those in Plates 4-b, 30, and 31), or for sketchily suggestive outline settings in multi-scene plays like *Two on an Island* (Plate 27-b). It is a satisfactory background for experimental abstraction in plays like *Jim Dandy* (Plate 19) or *The Skin of Our Teeth*. It can be used for outdoor scenes as readily as for indoor ones, either in space-stage simplification (as in Plates 21-a and 27-a), or in combination with a sky drop, draperies of other colors, wood-wings, or properties, or with several of these at once (Plates 20-b and 21-c). The initial cost of a black cyclorama is less than that of a well-built box set for the same stage; but its greatest economy lies in the fact that it makes possible the use of simplified foreground elements, which may be fresh and new for each play, highly varied in character, and yet very inexpensive. The screens shown in Plate 26 cost only about \$10 to build and have been used many times; those in Plates 30 and 31 cost about \$30 in each case, and the materials were largely salvaged. This kind of simplification saves not only in cost of materials, but in work and worry for the technical staff; and it makes possible the production of many plays—especially multi-scene plays—that would be prohibitively expensive mounted realistically.

Following this initial purchase, the next items of setting will naturally be the screens, flats, props, ground-rows, and so on, to be used in front of it, and to be purchased or built one by one as needed. Some of the items suggested for the arena and platform stages may be just as usable here, including the steps and platforms. But before the unrelieved black becomes too monotonous, it is wise to add a good sky drop, and some extra widths of curtain in a lighter color.

The sky drop should be as wide and as high as the rigging permits, and painted an even tone of light blue, with no landscape that would have to be frequently repainted. All landscape effects later desired should be

painted on ground-rows—that is, low, wide profile flats, set in front of the drop. A pale blue cloth cyclorama may be preferred to the drop, but is much more of a nuisance to handle. If the back wall of the stage house is free of doorways, radiators, and other obstructions, it may be

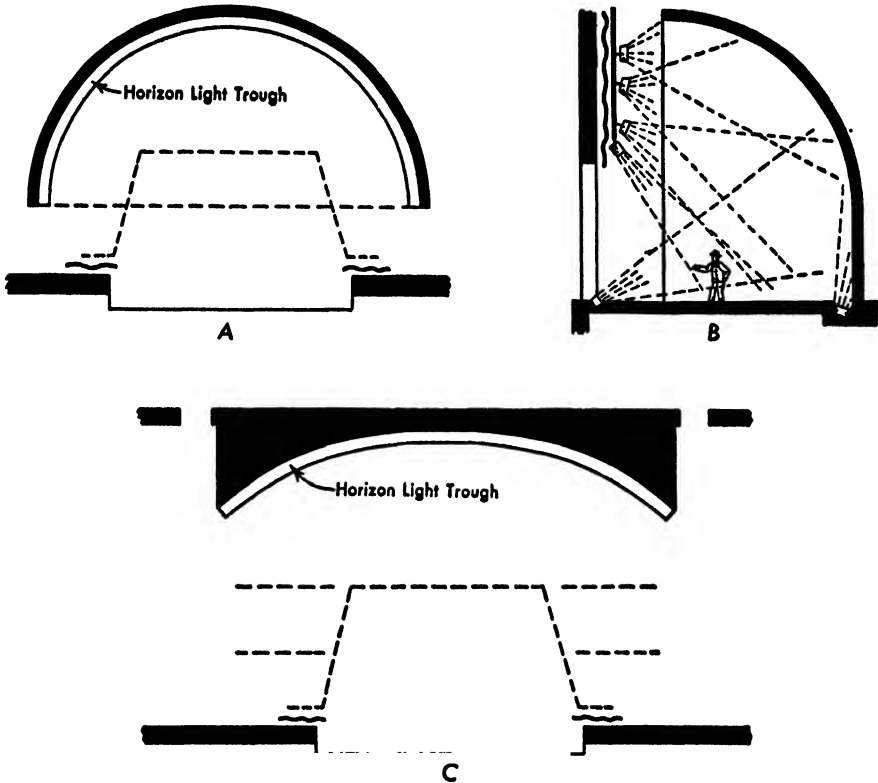


FIG. 34. PLASTER DOME AND CYCLORAMA.

*A* and *B* show plan and section of a permanent spherical sky dome. Note how seriously it interferes with the handling of ordinary scenery. It diffuses light well, even when directly lighted as at *B*, and even better when lighted indirectly as in the Fortuny system (by reflection from colored silk banners). *C* shows how a modified cyclorama (or even a modified dome) may be used without much interference with other scenery, though it needs more masking at the sides and above.

plastered and painted to serve as a drop, provided there is a passageway behind it from stage right to stage left. If a slightly concave wall (Fig. 34, *C*) is available this treatment is still more effective, the wall serving as a modified cyclorama, or (if curved at the top as well as the sides) as a modified "sky dome." The full, spherically curved sky dome (Fig. 34, *A* and *B*) has not proved lastingly popular. When well built it does

give a wonderful effect of infinite distance; but it is useful only in some scenes and it cramps the space and interferes seriously with the handling of other scenery. It is not to be recommended unless the space, machinery, and money are available to make it both substantial and retractable. For ordinary purposes and for economy, a well-painted sky drop is a better use of funds.

When additional drapes are desired, it is not necessary to purchase a whole set. Two 16-foot widths of a lighter color—preferably gray—will add variety to the black, and be usable with it. They should be of the same height, of course. Gray duvetine is suitable, and may be made to look much richer and to take the lights better if spattered lightly with scene paint in the pigment primary colors, slightly tinted. The gray curtains in Plate 20-b, c, d, e were so treated. Additional pairs in other colors may be added later, with or without the stippling, or with stippling in different colors or patterns. These pairs of drapes can be used as formal backdrops or as wing drapes; they may be raised or lowered on battens, or rigged as horizontal draw curtains, or as diagonal draw curtains (Plate 20). With two or three pairs in different shades, combined with the black, hung differently each time and differently lighted, it is possible to achieve effects of surprising richness without the monotony incidental to the usual gray or brown velour, used alone.

A good box setting, with enough extra flats to permit some flexible rearrangement, is a desirable early purchase—but not before the black drapes, and not before funds are available for good materials and construction. A full box set, with extra flats, ceiling piece, doors, windows, fireplace, and so on, costs money, even if home-built. If acquired first, it immediately sets a standard of complete realism, soon becomes monotonous if not repainted frequently, and almost seems to demand additional sets of contrasting style and design. Repainting a complete box set involves time and labor. Building additional units for it—doors, windows, stairways, and so on, of different design—involves still more; and building another complete set every now and then, to keep up the pace in realism, is the kind of chore that makes unpaid stage workers wonder why they do it. When there is plenty of money, plenty of help, and plenty of storage space, a new or renovated box set is feasible, and it usually pleases the people in the audience who do not do the work. But if drapes are acquired first, and simple, suggestive settings established as

a custom, the first box setting comes as a pleasant change rather than a permanent commitment.

When funds and space are available for only one box set, to be used repeatedly in various arrangements, with different furnishings, it is usual

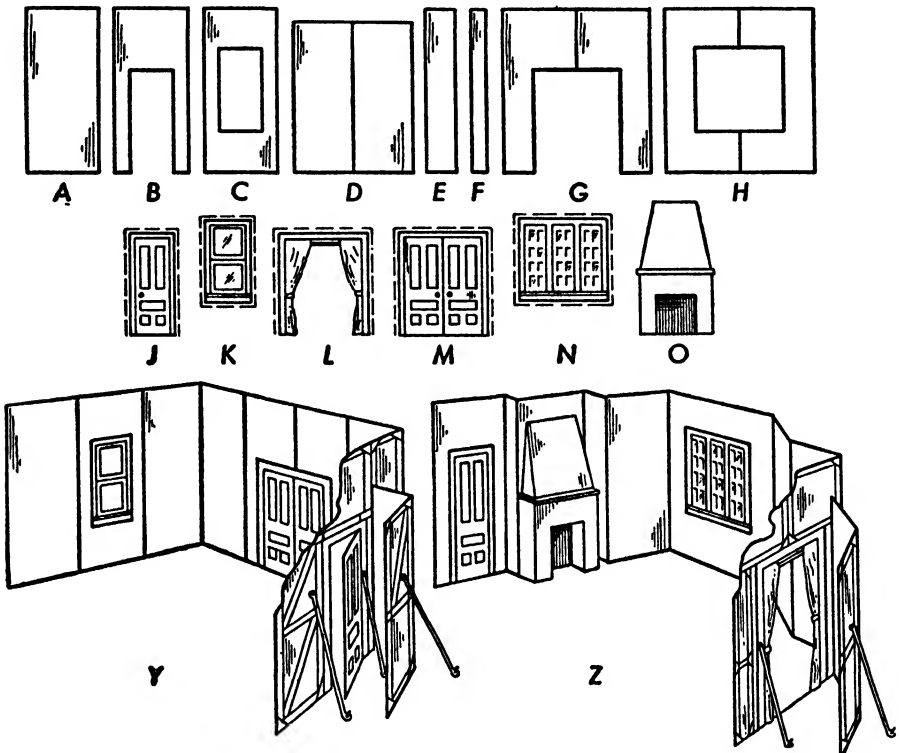


FIG. 35. AN ADAPTABLE BOX SETTING.

A to H, types of flats; D, a backing; G, H, hinged flats; J to O, framed pieces to go with flats. At least two each are needed of B, C, E, J, and K, and four or five each of A and F. The sketches at Y and Z show widely different arrangements of the units. Note that Y emphasizes the joints in the flats unpleasantly, while Z does not.

to paint it in a stippled or spattered over-all tone of brown, or tan, or gray, with plenty of color variety in the texture. This takes the lights better than a flat color, and can be used longer without offensive monotony. There is one serious disadvantage about over-all painting, however, in that the joints between flats are very conspicuous; the lighter the color, the worse this is. A set painted in some kind of paneled design,

with the joints concealed in the lines of paneling, is more realistically convincing, and usually more pleasing when used once (Plate 28-b); but if the colors are too vivid or contrasting (as in Plate 29) the audience quickly grows tired of seeing it in every play. The color of the inner panels can be changed occasionally with less work than is required to repaint a whole set; but even so, the paneled set will not bear as much repeated use as the stippled set. The best way to minimize the distraction of visible joints is to plan each arrangement of the set with many angles and alcoves but few flats joined edge to edge in one plane (Plate 28-a; Fig. 35). A good supply of jogs (narrow flats) makes this possible. Another thing that helps is at least one double flat, consisting of two 5-foot-9-inch or 6-foot flats hinged to fold face to face; the canvas is applied in a single unbroken stretch, not glued down at the joint, and painted right across the joint. If the flat is folded and unfolded frequently, the paint will crack a little and the canvas will eventually fray; but such a flat can be used a good many times before the joint becomes as noticeable as a lashed joint, and it can be repainted, and even repaired, for additional service.

If realism is desired in outdoor settings, the transition from draperies may be more gradual. Two wood-wings and a foliage border can be used with a sky drop and draperies, for a setting very suggestive of place, yet still frankly theatrical rather than realistic. Two more wood-wings and another border can be added when a little more realism is desired, and eventually enough to displace the drapes altogether. New or repainted ground-rows and set pieces, seen against the sky drop, provide most of the variety as needed. Three-dimensional set pieces—rocks, trees, bushes, and the like—add realism of the sort that challenges criticism, and commits the group to more and more, and bigger and better; but they are bulky to store and expensive to scrap. Flat pieces may be less realistic, but can be just as decorative, just as stimulating to the imagination, and more charmingly theatrical; they cost less in time and money, and are much easier to store.

Another type of setting, not so far mentioned, is the painted drapery—that is, a cloth cyclorama, or set of drapes, fully painted with a stylistic, or even a realistic, scene; not stretched flat like a drop but hung in folds with the fullness of ordinary drapes. Such an arrangement is effective in suggesting or symbolizing place, yet it remains frankly theatrical and

non-realistic. It is not, however, particularly inexpensive, since it must be painted especially for the current play.

As for lighting equipment on a proscenium stage—assuming that none is already installed—the order of purchase may well be much the same at first as for the platform stage; but rather more equipment will be needed sooner. If there is a balcony from which spots may be manually operated, the need of an elaborate first border will not be felt so urgently. Border lights must ordinarily be operated from the switchboard; so must a good many types of ceiling-beam lights, or balcony lights inaccessible to operators. Lights so operated have to be more numerous than manually operated ones to achieve the same degree of flexibility, since it is not ordinarily possible with switchboard control to change the color, aim, or focus of any light while the play is going on. Only the intensity can be changed; all other changes must be accomplished by dimming out some lights and bringing up others already pre-set to the desired color, aim, or focus. But workers on a proscenium stage are not likely to be happy until they have a good first border, with eight or ten spots of various types, and perhaps four larger floodlights; and of course the switchboard will be needed at the same time. Footlights are not so urgent, but are useful, and the portable strip-light foots are not very expensive. At least two olivettes will be needed back stage. Otherwise, supplementary acquisitions will be a matter of time, and will depend largely on the types of settings to be used.

#### THE SMALL BOXED-IN STAGE

And now, before we close the subject of setting and lighting, here are a few suggestions for those condemned to play on a small stage with solid walls and ceiling—such a stage as that shown in Fig. 7, *A*.

The first rule is: Do not attempt the impossible, or that which can be done only with obvious effort and strain. Remember the principle of fidelity to the limitations of materials.

It is perfectly possible on such a stage to construct a realistic box setting, and even a ceiling piece—though whether it is worth the bother is problematical.

In setting it up, the ceiling piece must be assembled first, while the stage is otherwise bare. It may be made of several flats, handled sepa-



rately for easy storage. They are laid out on the floor, face down, and pinned together with pin hinges—hinges from which the original pins have been removed and replaced with slightly thinner pieces of wire, bent at one end. Once the hinges are screwed to the flats in the right positions, the flats may be easily taken apart and put together by removing and replacing the pins. It may be necessary to screw a long batten or two to the back of the flats to keep them from sagging, especially at the front edge where there will be no wall to support them. If pulleys can be fastened to the permanent ceiling at the four corners, sash-cord lines may be used to haul the ceiling piece up against the ceiling. If this is *verboden*, it may be raised on four poles of the right length.

The wall flats should be of such height as to allow a foot or so of clearance at the top for handling the ceiling piece. If it is desired to set the flats close to the permanent wall for maximum playing space, and if that leaves no room to lash and brace them in the ordinary way, they also may be assembled on the floor with pin hinges. Each wall must be assembled as a unit, battened together, and raised into position against the permanent wall. A long lash-line on each end-flat of the rear wall may be laid against the side wall, and when all three walls are raised it is pulled taut and fastened to an accessible cleat on the back of the side wall, to hold the corner joint together. The ceiling piece is then slacked off to rest on top of the wall flats, and will steady them with no further bracing.

Obviously such a set must have its only doorways or practical windows where doors or windows exist in the permanent walls. At those points they can be reached, and can be braced. What may be used behind them for backing depends upon the width, depth, and height of the permanent openings and the spaces behind them. A box set of this type can be made fairly satisfactory for a one-set play; but to strike it and substitute another between acts is a Herculean task, necessitating a very long wait. If the permanent ceiling is neutral and unobtrusive, the ceiling piece may be omitted, with some saving in time and labor. In that case a cornice molding to fit the top of each wall, with a mitred joint at each corner, helps give a finished appearance; it may also be designed to serve as a stiffening batten.

To make possible a quick change of indoor scenes with a single box set, the best technique is to cover the surface with a different fabric for

each scene—each quite distinct in color and texture. The fabric is sewn together, and tacked at the top edge to very light battens— $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 2", perhaps—each the exact length of one wall. The height should be that of the flats, and the spaces for windows and doors should be cut out to exact size and shape. The battens are slipped just over the tops of the flats, and weighted down by the ceiling piece. The doorframes and window frames are then set in with their trim overlapping the fabric, and a baseboard placed against the lower edge all around. Such a covering can be set up in ten minutes or less, and can be removed in two minutes, and carried out wrapped on the battens. With duplicate baseboards, doorframes and window frames, differently painted, the effect is that of a complete change of set. This technique can also be used on a more commodious stage, with a larger box set. It is the most economical and satisfactory method, for example, in a play like *George Washington Slept Here*, where two successive scenes represent the same room before and after renovation; the clean, well-painted set is covered with dirty gray canvas, and the door and window spaces filled with battered-looking imitations of half-rotten frames, roughly boarded up. Between acts these are removed, the clean walls uncovered, and freshly painted doors and windows set in place. The result is very convincing.

As an interesting commentary on the whole business of realistic setting, however, I should like to cite the experience of one organization which went to a great deal of trouble to give *George Washington Slept Here*, using this technique, and did so very successfully; but later gave it again at an army camp with no scenery whatever and with equal—if not greater—success!

For outdoor scenes, convincing realism on a tiny, walled-in stage is well-nigh impossible. The conventional wood-wings, borders, sky drop, and ground-rows, made in reduced size, serve about as well as anything—unless there is a permanent sky dome. Changes of set from indoors to outdoors, or vice versa, are inescapably slow.

On the whole, it is a question whether the best combination of economy and flexibility for a very small stage is not to be found in the same sort of simplification recommended for initial techniques on a larger stage. A black cloth cyclorama can be used in the same way, hung right against the walls; the same types of units can be used in front of it, though they may have to be smaller. The production of *The Rivals* shown in Plate

30 was later repeated successfully on a very small stage with a black cyclorama, using the same unit set, but without the two end sections and the largest tree. More realistic plays can be given with two hinged screens to mark the corners of an imaginary room and painted to symbolize its style, and with the lights concentrated on the furniture and the actors (Plate 14). Outdoor scenes can be given semi-formally with combinations of drapes, sky drop, and ground-rows, as on a larger stage. And most of the materials used for such techniques will have at least some salvage value if the organization later moves to a larger stage.

### SCENE PAINTING

The painting of scenery can be learned only by experience; no detailed instructions will be attempted here. But there are one or two bits of advice that may help to shorten the learning period.

If possible, use prepared scene paints rather than untreated dry colors. The former have ingredients to make them mix easily with water and glue; the latter do not. If only the untreated pigments are available, they can be mixed first with denatured alcohol and the water added later. Pay no attention to formulas specifying the quantities of glue, water, whiting, and color. Too much depends upon the kind of glue used, the amount of water already in it, the lightness or darkness of color desired, and the particular pigment used. For a dark color use no whiting at first, adding only a little if needed. For a light color it is possible to start with glue, whiting, and water—warm, of course—and to add color as desired. In either case, start with less glue than needed, and add more if necessary. The only sure way to check the amount is to make a test sample and let it dry thoroughly. If it chinks off when rubbed with the finger, it needs more glue. If it sparkles and shows a tendency to draw and crack it has too much glue. The only way to test the color is also to let it dry; scene paint always dries lighter than it looks when wet. The dried sample should be tried out on the stage under the proper lights.

For many touch-up jobs, and for painting colorful designs, medallions, coats of arms, mural decorations, and so on, casein paints are useful. Though thinned with water, these are handled much like oils, and may be used from a palette in much the same way. But they dry almost waterproof, and cannot be washed off afterwards.

For painting properties and furniture, regular lacquers or enamels are usually best—though scene paint may be used if it is desired to wash the color off later. If the object does not have to be handled, the wash-off is facilitated by omitting the glue.

The cardinal rules of scene painting are: Mix enough to do the job; mix it carefully; slap it on, with coarse texture and no close detail; and do not burn the glue!

### PROPERTIES

Amateurs usually need less advice on the subject of properties than on any other phase of production. Making, borrowing, and shopping for "props" is varied and entertaining work, a natural stimulus to ingenuity. As every experienced property man—or woman—knows, the great American "five-and-ten" stores are most helpful. They not only offer cheap, good-looking china, glass, "silver," bric-a-brac, fittings, drapery materials, and what not, but they offer *suggestions*. The inspiration for many a clever device or effect has been found on the counters of such stores, where articles are spread out in plain sight. The mail-order catalogues are equally helpful; so are the windows of the army-and-navy-goods stores. A few trifling purchases, a little wire, or lumber, or canvas, and an *idea*, will often enable the property man to improvise what would cost dollars to hire, and scores of dollars to purchase. Money paid out for renting properties gives no permanent return; on the other hand there is great satisfaction in building up a permanent stock of properties which, with occasional alterations, can be utilized again and again.

As suggested in an earlier chapter, too many properties are confusing and distracting. On the other hand, too few sometimes weaken the illusion, and create another kind of distraction by failing to convince. Well-selected properties help tremendously, for example, in the difficult matter of making a dinner scene convincing. But wax fruit and papier-mâché roast chickens should be forbidden by law, except as background properties. Artificial flowers can be very distracting also, if handled by the actors and made to rattle or rustle, though they are usually unobjectionable if used merely for decoration.

A property often called for in realistic plays is a practicable clock, which registers the time to suit the dialogue. Since the dialogue cannot be timed accurately enough to coincide with the clock, the clock must be

regulated to coincide with the dialogue. One method of doing this is to extend the shafts of the clock through the back wall of the setting, and turn them by hand from behind. A better method, which permits of the clock being placed at any position on the stage, is to rig up an electric control. An ordinary clock is used, but with the pendulum or balance wheel removed so that it will run very fast; and this is controlled by a spring brake, so arranged that it can be released by the pull of an electromagnet. The operator stands in the wings or out front, where he can see the clock, and by pressing a button for an instant every few seconds he slips the clutch, so to speak, and allows the clock to move as rapidly as he desires. With a little practice he can make the motion quite imperceptible to the audience, and yet bring the hands to the right place for a given crisis in the play.

Another useful device is a prompter's desk, adjustable as to height and mounted with a comfortable chair or stool on a small movable platform or "dolly," so that it may be placed differently for different sets (Plate 32-c). Over the desk should be a row of push buttons for such effects as doorbell, telephone bell, and buzzer, and perhaps one or two signals. The bell units, especially the telephone, should have long cords so that they may be placed at any part of the stage. Current may be supplied by a portable battery box, or by a bell-ringing transformer mounted to be plugged in at any stage pocket.

Off-stage effects in constant demand include wind and rain machines, automobile horns and motors, hoofbeat effects, and thunder sheets. The latter are usually made of sheet iron, but are not very convincing unless of large size and deep tone. Better effects are sometimes to be had with recordings. A good play-back outfit with a high-fidelity amplifier and speaker is now almost a necessity in any theatre, both for music and for off-stage sound effects. It is an advantage to have two speakers, one out front for music, the other back stage for effects. Stage-effect records are available in great variety, for wind, rain, thunder, gunfire, applause, laughter, mob cries, auto horns and engines, locomotives, and what not. Many effects not listed can be achieved with a home recording outfit, or a portable recorder borrowed from a school. Off-stage effects are quite commonly operated too close to be convincing; the sound of an automobile too often bursts on the ear suddenly and obtrusively, and even when a real motor is used it does not sound real. A great many

off-stage effects are mere stunts, and are unnecessary to the dramatic purpose; such effects might well be dispensed with. When effects are necessary they should be removed to the proper distance; the best place for an automobile supposed to be heard from the street is *in* the street, with the stage door slightly open. One of the chief advantages of recorded effects is that they can be built up or softened down with the volume control.

### COSTUMES

There is far more joy in amateur play production if the costumes, as well as the properties, are designed and made by the group. Certain articles, of course, cannot readily be made by novices, and have to be rented or borrowed—men's tailored suits, military uniforms, fine brocaded gowns, and so on. But most of the costumes for symbolic or fantastic plays can be made quite satisfactorily, and out of comparatively inexpensive materials. Skill in dyeing and decorating, together with skill in stage lighting, can make cheap fabrics look like silk and velvet.

For a play like *The Yellow Jacket*, for example, costumes may be made of satin rayon and made to look fabulously rich by "embroidery" in the form of casein paint, put on with a small sable brush. This paint is easily handled, mixes readily in any colors, dries quickly, is almost waterproof, and pulls slightly as it dries, giving the embossed effect of real embroidery. Many of the costumes shown in Plates 17 and 26 were made that way, at a cost of about \$3 each.

In the selection of costumes the director should be clear about his motives. Costume may be realistically representative of a character, a type, a social caste, a race, a country, or a period of history—any, or all of these things; or it may be stylistic, or expressionistic, or symbolic, or merely decorative. Some of these motives may be combined, but others are inconsistent and contradictory. The motives should be determined first, and should be determined for the whole play, before any individual costumes are designed or selected.

To represent realistically a period other than our own the designer must have accurate information, and until very recently that has been rather hard to get. Historical costuming used to be done very crudely. Most of the costumers who rented to amateurs had large stocks representing just a few periods—the Greek and Roman, the Elizabethan, the

Colonial, the Civil War, and the modern. Books on costume were expensive, and hard to find, except in the largest libraries; most of them were in foreign languages, and very poorly illustrated. Now, however, there are several readily available and relatively inexpensive books, clearly illustrated and very helpful. At the same time the audiences have learned to demand more accurate costuming, for they have been witnessing historical moving pictures the producers of which have spent thousands of dollars in research. The little-theatre director, if he attempts historical costuming in a realistic way, must expect, therefore, to take pains.

For fanciful or poetic costume plays, however, literal accuracy is seldom necessary. Effective stylization or intelligible symbolism is usually better. But to catch the particular flavor of a period or to express a particular mood, in costume, requires both knowledge and judgment. The director should not only study the history of costume, but should analyze it philosophically, and in this he will get little help from the books, and less from the historians than from the anthropologists. Man's notion of what constitutes appropriate dress, in different periods and on different occasions, is a very important key to his thought and culture, and so to the essential elements of drama.

In designing costumes it is exceedingly important to choose the colors wisely. Each costume should be appropriate in color, as well as in style, to the particular character, and mood, and theme, and at the same time it should fit in decoratively with the color scheme of the stage picture as a whole. To take care of this adequately is no small task, especially if changing colored lights are to be used. If it is humanly possible the costumes should be ready well before the production date, so that they may be tried out under the lights, in the proper stage groupings, and changed if not satisfactory.

#### MAKE-UP

The most important thing that can be said about make-up for amateurs is that most of them use too much.

The books on make-up, with one or two recent exceptions, follow the practice of the professional stage in the period of brightest lights and largest theatres, when it was practically necessary for an actor to rebuild

his face in bright-colored grease paints in order to counteract the glare of the white footlights and produce an effect at a distance.

With the smaller theatres and more subdued lights of today very little make-up is needed except for character purposes. For straight parts, unless the actor's face requires correction, only enough is needed to restore the natural hues and shadows under the lighting conditions of the particular scene. One director, asked by a young actress how much make-up to use for a certain part, replied: "About half as much as you use on the street." This advice would hold good for many parts, and for many young actresses.

There are three general types of straight make-ups: the full grease make-up, the dry make-up, and the mere touch-up.

For the full grease make-up the actor first applies cold cream, rubs it well into the skin, and then wipes it off thoroughly. He uses a ground color of grease paint, light or dark according to the character and to the lighting effects to be used; most actors now prefer the soft paints in tubes rather than the old-fashioned sticks which usually have to be softened with heat. He then heightens the color of his cheeks with red grease paint, blending it gradually with the ground color. It is usually necessary to darken the eyelids slightly to restore the natural shadows killed by the footlights. The face is then dusted with powder to set the grease paint and dull the surface; and as the powders change color somewhat when applied, and do so differently on different skins, nothing but experiment will tell the actor what color to use. A lining pencil is then used on the eyelids and eyebrows, black for the eyelids, and black or brown for the eyebrows, according to the general complexion. A dot of carmine at the inner corner of the eye brightens it up a little, as does the laborious process of beading the eyelashes, but neither is worth while unless bright lights are to be used. Beaded or false eyelashes are not visible beyond twenty feet; a better effect may be had with a row of black dots painted on the edge of each eyelid with a brush or pencil. Even with a full make-up there is no established ritual, as some of the books seem to imply; there are many variations of method, and many different ways of getting good results. There is only one test of a good make-up, and that is its appearance on the stage under actual lighting conditions. The advantage claimed for the full grease make-up is that



it blends consistently and is easily managed to give any desired effect in any known light. Its obvious disadvantage is that it encases the face in a mask and interferes with the play of facial expression. Incidentally, it is messy, soils the linen and even the outer clothing, and is hard to touch up if damaged.

The powder make-up is managed in the same way, except that the grease foundation is omitted, and dry rouge substituted for the red grease on the cheeks. The cold cream may be used beforehand, and unless it is used the powder make-up is apt to be blotchy and hard to get off; but the cream should be wiped off thoroughly before the powder is applied. At best the powder make-up is dependent upon the quality of the actor's skin. On a smooth soft skin it blends evenly, is less obtrusive, and is altogether preferable to the grease make-up. On a rough or uneven skin it is more difficult to manage than the grease make-up.

For most amateur purposes in small theatres a full make-up is not necessary. On anything but a very florid skin some heightening of color is usually desirable unless the lights are to be very dull; but a little dry rouge is often enough. If the footlights are the chief source of light the shadows under the eyebrows will have to be restored. But a very little make-up judiciously applied and smoothly blended is generally more effective than a full mask of color, and does not interfere with the facial expression.

The director should take particular pains to see that there is uniformity in the make-ups—not uniformity of method, necessarily, but uniformity of effect. It is always bad to have one member of the cast made up as if for the stage of the Metropolitan Opera, while another has but a shading of rouge; or to have some players made up realistically and others stylistically. There is a strong tendency among the men to use too dark a powder, and among the women to use dead white. There should be some difference in color between the sexes, but not too much. Nearly all amateurs of both sexes use too much lipstick.

For character make-ups, wigs, crepe hair, nose putty, and lining pencils are the chief instruments. Wigs should be avoided as much as possible, since they must usually be hired and seldom fit well unless they are very expensive indeed.

Crepe hair is usually applied too hastily. The spirit gum should be allowed to set a moment or two, and become tacky. For a short, stubby

beard or mustache a quantity of hair should be clipped from the braid in lengths of an eighth of an inch or less; this should be gathered in a wad and dabbed on the tacky gum. If a longer beard or mustache is required, a quantity of longer hair should be combed out into a mat, cut off the comb with sharp scissors, and the cut surface applied to the tacky gum. When thoroughly set it may be trimmed to shape. This type of beard will not stand much pulling, however.

For longer—and stronger—whiskers, the hair should be unwoven, moistened, pulled taut, and dried to take the kinks out. It is then pulled apart, without combing, and strands of the proper length, about a quarter inch in diameter, are put in place one at a time by gluing the ends on firmly. For very long beards which must bear close inspection or rough usage it is usually best to depend upon the wigmaker. The edges of beards may be blended more naturally by stippling with a lining pencil.

Nose putty is more useful than generally realized, but troublesome for those who do not know how to use it. The skin should be free of grease or perspiration; if cold cream has been applied it should be wiped off thoroughly. The putty must be kneaded long and vigorously until soft, pliable, and as warm as the hand. A very little cold cream may be used on the fingers to prevent its sticking—never enough to feel greasy. When ready, the putty is applied to the skin, and the edges worked out thinly and blended firmly into the skin all round before any attempt is made to shape it. This is the most important point. Once thoroughly stuck and blended, it may easily be molded to the desired shape and will stay on. Grease paint and powder may then be applied right over skin and putty and no joint will be visible.

The most important use of nose putty is not just for grotesque noses, but for slight changes in the contour of nose, chin, forehead, temples, cheeks, and so on, or for filling in unwanted wrinkles or hollows. Used at the outer ends of the upper eyelids it gives the effect of extreme age. Used at either side of the chin, a little of it will fill in those triangular depressions which are the telltale signs of the life that begins at forty.

Character lines are the real test of the actor's skill in make-up. Some of the books advise the beginner to study photographs and practice copying them in make-up; but nothing is more difficult to read for lines than a photograph. It is far better to follow crayon or pen sketches, carica-

tures, or cartoons, picking out the significant lines and practicing with them in exaggerated form until a measure of skill is acquired. Generally speaking, the best make-ups are achieved with hollows and depressions rather than with lines, and with high lights as well as shadows. There has been a tendency in the non-realistic theatre to experiment with grotesque, or symbolic, or stylized make-up; and if such experiment bears no other fruit it will at least serve to demonstrate the significance of bold strokes in establishing character or expression.

Nobody can learn make-up by reading about it; the thing is to procure the materials and practice. It is a matter, not of formula, but of skill, experience, taste, and judgment. Elaborate equipment will not do the trick, nor is it always necessary. One of the best make-ups I ever saw was improvised at a seashore resort out of talcum powder, a burnt cork, a matchstick, a piece of manila rope dyed in a mixture of coffee and ink, and some liquid court plaster. The matchstick and the burnt cork supplied the lines, and the rope was turned into a fine pair of side whiskers, fastened with the liquid court plaster; and when the impersonator appeared in a room full of guests he was promptly mistaken for the local minister—somewhat to that gentleman's annoyance.

It is highly desirable for each actor to learn to make himself up, subject to inspection by the director; but the actor who practices only on himself labors under a disadvantage. He cannot check up on his own work. He cannot see himself at a distance, under the conditions of actual stage lighting. He should seek, therefore, all possible criticism of his work from those who can see him from out front, and every opportunity to make others up, and to watch the results.

#### THE CURTAIN

And now, before we ring it down, let us give some attention to that very important item of theatrical equipment, the curtain.

The curtain, like everything else in the established theatre, has been under fire in recent years. Some critics, on the theory that it represents a fourth wall removed, have wanted to correct the evil by removing the curtain. Others have objected, not to the curtain, but to the method of operation, having made the astonishing discovery that when the curtain is raised the actor is disclosed feet first, and when it is lowered his head is cut off before his heels. The Romans, of course, did it the other way,

dropping the curtain into a slot at the beginning of the play, and raising it into place at the end; and some critics have wanted to restore the Roman method. In the old New York Hippodrome a curtain was actually used which rose from the bottom, but there was no gain in unobtrusiveness, nor was there any gain in logic. It is just as absurd to cut off the actor's feet as his head; moreover, the rising curtain gives a curious sensation of seeing the actor swallowed up in a cave-in or quicksand. Most of the objectors to the drop curtain, therefore, have advocated not a rising curtain, but draw curtains.

Draw curtains, as we know, are more informal and more suggestive of real life; and their advocates point out that these make no discrimination between the actor's head and his feet. But other critics note the appalling fact that draw curtains do discriminate between the actor's right hand and his left, and that at a certain instant only half of the actor may be visible to the audience—which seems just as bad as having him headless or legless for an instant. The dilemma has led a few adventurous souls to propose a more revolutionary scheme: a curtain opening like the iris of a camera, in all directions at once, and from a central point. The mechanical difficulty has prevented any serious attempt to put it into practice; but the same purpose can be achieved, much less obtrusively, by another moving picture device: the "fade-in." With the house lights out, the curtain can be taken up unseen, and then the lights can be brought up with the dimmers, revealing the full scene at once.

There is much to be said for the use of lights in lieu of a curtain, provided they can be controlled perfectly; they are silent, sure, and intensely spiritual. But there is little merit in the attempt to replace the conventional drop curtain with queer mechanical devices, or even with draw curtains. The curtain has no significance of its own; its purpose is concealment and revelation at the proper times, with the least possible distraction. Any kind of curtain that moves swiftly and silently, and without calling attention to itself, is good; and any kind that is awkward, or noisy, or obtrusive in any way is bad.

As suggested earlier, the curtain is a problem in the outdoor theatre, or in any theatre with no proscenium and nothing but space above the stage. The beautiful outdoor theatre on the Longwood estate of Mr. and Mrs. Pierre DuPont, near Kennett, Pa. (Plate 24), is equipped with a water curtain. As the act ends, jets of water, closely spaced, rise just

behind the footlights to a height of perhaps ten feet, catching the light and concealing the stage. Steam or vapor curtains are sometimes used in the same way; Max Reinhardt used vapor in his famous indoor production of *The Miracle*. Most outdoor theatres, however, use only the light curtain.

Amateurs working indoors must often use draw curtains as a matter of necessity, no regular curtain and no space for one being available. But draw curtains are just as distracting to the eye as a drop curtain, and are usually far more distracting to the ear. A drop curtain, if properly rigged, can be raised or lowered silently, surely, and at any desired speed, and if the spectator is in any danger of meditating too extensively on the actor's feet, speed is the best corrective. I have yet to see a set of draw curtains that operate silently. Most of them scrape and rattle, move jerkily, stick occasionally, and fail to close completely in the middle.

To those who wish to establish a formal stage with no curtain at all, I have nothing to say. There is a place for the formal stage. But those who try to persuade the builders of little theatres to install rich, beautiful draw curtains, as being more refined, more cozy, more artistic than a drop curtain, are leading them straight into error. The drop curtain can be made as refined and beautiful as any draw curtain; its descent at the end of the play is as logical as the falling shades of night; and its silent efficiency is one of the most comforting experiences in the theatre.

# Bibliography

SO VAST is the number of books and articles about the theatre, and so rapid the output of new ones, that an exhaustive bibliography would fill several volumes, and would be seriously out of date before it could be printed and bound. The following list includes only a few titles in each division of the subject—not necessarily the best works, but the ones thought to be most useful for the student of play production, or most likely to be overlooked. Only works in English are included, and, with few exceptions, only works in print; the exceptions are items of unique interest, available in most good libraries. Works primarily on the literary aspects of the drama are excluded as belonging to another field. A short list of periodical articles (excluded in the first edition) has been added, together with a bibliographical summary. Most of the books mentioned contain bibliographies in their special fields; those which have exceptionally useful ones are starred (\*).

## THE ÆSTHETIC BACKGROUND

BUTCHER, S. H. *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*. (London, Macmillan, 1911.)

Aristotle is the starting point for æsthetic study; this is an introduction to him.

BOSANQUET, BERNARD. *A History of Æsthetic*. (Sonnenschein, 1910.)

A readable and comprehensive account.

PUFFER, ETHEL. *The Psychology of Beauty*. (Houghton Mifflin, 1905.)

A standard textbook, emphasizing the theory of repose.

LANGFELD, HERBERT S. *The Æsthetic Attitude*. (Harcourt, Brace, 1920.)

The most helpful single book on æsthetics for the stage director.

BATCHELDER, E. A. *Design in Theory and Practice*. (Macmillan, 1910.)

A practical introduction to graphic design, with excellent analysis of primitive art.

JACOBS, MICHEL. *The Art of Color*. (Doubleday, 1926.)

Clear, helpful, comprehensive. Beautifully illustrated in color.

CRAIG, EDWARD GORDON. *On the Art of the Theatre*. (London, Browne, 1911.)

Reprinted, Dodd, Mead, 1925.)

The book that stirred up a revolution in theatrical philosophy.

GEDDES, NORMAN BEL. *Horizons*. (Little, Brown, 1937.)

The philosophy of modernism in art, architecture, and theatre.

MITCHELL, ROY. *Creative Theatre*. (John Day, 1929.)

A highly individual philosophy of theatre, dynamically expressed.

## HISTORY OF THE THEATRE

MANTZIUS, KARL. *A History of Theatrical Art* (6 vols.). (London, Duckworth, 1903. N. Y., P. Smith, 1937.)

Not a piece of exact scholarship, but the most comprehensive history in English.

\*NICOLL, ALLARDICE. *The Development of the Theatre*. (London, Hartrap, 1927; Rev., 1937.)

A scholarly history of theatre architecture, scenic art, and method, lavishly illustrated. Extensive bibliography, especially rich in foreign references.

HUGHES, GLENN. *The Story of the Theatre*. (French, 1928.)

A simple, one-volume history, much used as a college text.

CHENEY, SHELDON. *The Theatre: 3000 Years of Drama, Acting and Stagecraft*. (Longmans, Green, 1935.)

Probably the most widely read one-volume history. Covers the early periods especially well, in popular style.

CHENEY, SHELDON. *Stage Decoration*. (Day, 1927.)

An older book, but still valuable for its 256 fine illustrations.

\*FREEDLEY, GEORGE, and REEVES, JOHN L. *A History of the Theatre*. (Crown Publishers.)

One of the most readable histories, especially good on the more recent periods, and on the New York and the continental stage. Many illustrations. Excellent historical bibliography of 433 titles.

\*ALLEN, JAMES TURNER. *Stage Antiquities of the Greeks and Romans*. (Longmans, Green, 1927.)

A fine, carefully factual little book, more helpful and trustworthy than most of the larger works. Scholarly bibliography.

SMITH, WINIFRED. *The Commedia dell'Arte*. (Columbia U. Press, 1912.)

The best-known book on this interesting subject.

CAMPBELL, LILY B. *Scenes and Machines on the English Stage During the Renaissance*. (Macmillan, 1923.)

A most interesting account of the Renaissance theatre, Italian as well as English.

\*NEILSON, W. A., and THORNDIKE, A. H. *The Facts About Shakespeare*. (Macmillan, 1914.)

Short, highly factual, and more trustworthy than the long biographies. Scholarly bibliography.

ADAMS, JOSEPH QUINCY. *Shakespearean Playhouses*. (Houghton Mifflin, 1917.)

The most comprehensive study of Elizabethan theatres and their equipment.

\*THORNDIKE, ASHLEY H. *Shakespeare's Theatre*. (Macmillan, 1925.)

Shorter and later. Good bibliography.

ADAMS, JOHN C. *The Globe Playhouse*. (Harvard Press, 1942.)

An intensively specialized study for those interested in Shakespeare's own theatre.

WALLACE, CHARLES WILLIAM. *The Children of the Chapel at Blackfriars*. (U. of Nebraska, 1908.)

An exhaustive piece of research, furnishing most of the facts known about this theatre.

HARBAGE, ALFRED G. *Shakespeare's Audiences*. (Columbia U. Press, 1941.)

A fine piece of scholarship throwing much light on actor-audience relationships.

DORAN, JOHN. *Annals of the English Stage*. (London, 1865.)

Old, but still valuable, especially for its chapters on theatres and audiences.

BAKER, H. BARTON. *History of the London Stage, 1576-1903*. (London, 1904.)

Not so well known as Doran, but brings the story to the present century.

ODELL, GEORGE C. D. *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*. (Scribners, 1920.)

Follows the changing methods of production through two centuries.

SPRAGUE, A. C. *Shakespeare and the Actors*. (Harvard Press, 1944.)

A similar study, with emphasis on stage business. Very thorough.

WAXMAN, S. M. *Antoine and the Théâtre Libre*. (Harvard Press, 1926.)

The standard work on the beginning of the free theatre movement.

MILLER, ANNA IRENE. *The Independent Theatre in Europe, 1887 to Date*. (Long and Smith, 1931.)

Traces the same movement through its subsequent stages.

ODELL, GEORGE C. D. *Annals of the New York Stage*. (12 vols.; more to come.) (Columbia U. Press, 1927-1939.)

A monumental history of the N. Y. theatre; not yet complete.

MOTHERWELL, HIRAM K. *The Theatre of Today*. (Dodd, Mead, 1914, 1924.)

The first account of the changing modern theatre, especially in Europe. Out-of-date, but still valuable, especially for its illustrations.

MACGOWAN, KENNETH. *The Theatre of Tomorrow*. (Boni & Liveright, 1921.)

Reviews the same ground and goes beyond it by venturing prophecies, a few of which have come true. Intensely readable. Well illustrated.

BELASCO, DAVID. *The Theatre Through Its Stage Door*. (Harper, 1919.)

Informative, and ably representative of the realist's side of the case.

STANISLAVSKY, CONSTANTIN. *My Life in Art*. (Little, Brown, 1924.)

An autobiography, but also a history of the Moscow Art Theatre.

SAYLER, OLIVER. *The Russian Theatre*. (Brentano, 1922.)

A good account of the revolutionary transition in Russian theatre.

VAN GYSEGHAN, ANDRÉ. *Theatre in Soviet Russia*. (London, Faber, 1943.)

A glowing account, from an English left-wing point of view. Informative.

FLANAGAN, HALLIE. *Arena*. (Duell, Sloan and Pierce, 1940.)

A history and defense of the late Federal Theatre Project, by its director.

ZUCKER, ADOLPH E. *The Chinese Theatre*. (Little, Brown, 1925.)

The most widely read account of the world's most lasting theatre.

CH'ENG, HSUI-LING. *Secrets of the Chinese Drama*. (Shanghai, Kelly & Walsh, 1937.)

A beautiful book, with magnificent colored illustrations of Chinese costume and make-up, and an account of classic traditions as interpreted by Cecilia Zung, modern Chinese actress.

WALEY, ARTHUR. *The Nō Plays of Japan*. (Knopf, 1922.)

The standard work on the Japanese classic theatre, with diagrams.

KINCAID, ZOË. *Kabuki, the Popular Stage of Japan*. (Macmillan, 1925.)

The most useful of available books on this limited subject.

REED, J. V. *The Curtain Falls*. (Harcourt, Brace, 1935.)

A devastating picture of modern theatre in New York. The stage-struck girl (or boy) should read this, *The Adventures of a Play* (L. E. Shipman), and *The Truth About the Theatre* (Anonymous) before electing a Broadway career.

#### PRODUCTION AND STAGECRAFT

(Books on production are legion, many covering the same general field as the present text. Only such works are listed as are notably different, or cover more adequately those phases of the subject herein treated very briefly.)



CAPEK, KAREL. *How a Play Is Produced*. (London, Bles, 1928.)

Read this first! A highly amusing account by the famous Czech dramatist, and very comforting to the amateur in its description of European professional methods.

DEAN, ALEXANDER. *Little Theatre Organization and Management*. (Appleton, 1926.)

A practical and useful book, widely used and acclaimed.

BRICKER, HERSHEL L. *Our Theatre Today*. (French, 1939.)

A compilation of essays by thirteen experts in various phases of theatre work.

HOUGHTON, NORRIS. *Moscow Rehearsals*. (Harcourt, Brace, 1936.)

An account of modern methods of production in the Soviet.

HOUGHTON, NORRIS. *Advance from Broadway*. (Harcourt, Brace, 1941.)

A penetrating and comprehensive view of play production in America.

HUGHES, GLENN. *The Penthouse Theatre*. (French, 1942.)

An account of the arena theatre at the University of Washington, and its methods.

SIMONSON, LEE. *The Stage Is Set*. (Harcourt, Brace, 1932.)

A philosophical discussion of stage design, handsomely illustrated.

BURRIS-MEYER, H., and COLE, E. C. *Scenery for the Theatre*. (Little, Brown, 1938.)

A comprehensive treatise on the physical aspects of modern theatre.

CORNBERG, S., and GEBAUER, E. L. *A Stage Crew Handbook*. (Harper, 1941.)

One of the most complete and practical back-stage manuals.

SELDEN, S., and SELLMAN, H. *Stage Scenery and Lighting*. (Crofts, 1936.)

Two books in one cover. The revised edition is especially good.

FUCHS, THEODORE. *Stage Lighting*. (Little, Brown, 1929.)

A little behind the times, but still the best comprehensive text on the subject.

MCCANDLESS, STANLEY. *A Method of Lighting the Stage*. (Theatre Arts, 1932.)

Widely used where modern equipment is available.

(For post-war lighting developments watch the announcements in *Theatre Arts*, and write for the catalogues of the various stage lighting companies which advertise in that and other publications.)

#### COSTUME AND MAKE-UP

(Many of the best books on costume are expensive, and available only in the largest libraries. The ones mentioned are relatively inexpensive, but useful.)

\*SAGE, ELIZABETH. *A Study of Costume*. (Scribner, 1926.)

A one-volume historical account, with good illustrations, and a short but good bibliography.

GRIMBALL, ELIZABETH, and WELLS, RHEA. *Costuming a Play*. (Century, 1925.)

A neatly illustrated but brief volume on the chief periods.

DABNEY, EDITH, and WISE, CARL W. *A Book of Dramatic Costume*. (Crofts, 1935.)

Slightly more comprehensive, but similar in purpose.

MCCLELLAN, ELISABETH. *Historic Dress in America*. (2 vols.) (Phila., Jacobs, 1904, 1917.)

Limited in scope, but one of the few good costume books readily available.

CHALMERS, HELENA. *The Art of Make-Up*. (Appleton, 1925.)

A brief treatment; probably the most widely used as an elementary text.

PARSONS, CHARLES S. *A Guide to Theatrical Make-Up*. (London, Pitman, 1932.)

The best-known British text on this subject. Foreword by Sir Cedric Hardwicke.

STRENKOVSKY, SERGE. *The Art of Make-Up*. (Dutton, 1937.)

One of the most elaborate texts, covering the more difficult types of plastic make-up.

CORSON, RICHARD. *Stage Make-Up*. (Crofts, 1942.)

Perhaps the most popular of the newer texts.

#### THEORY AND TECHNIQUE OF ACTING

ARCHER, WILLIAM. *Masks or Faces*. (London, Longmans, 1888.)

A digest of many opinions. Old, but still the most valuable book on basic theory.

LEWES, GEORGE HENRY. *On Actors and the Art of Acting*. (Brentano, n.d.)

Another old book, still valuable as a critical analysis of 19th-century acting.

BERNHARDT, SARAH. *The Art of the Theatre*. (Tr. by Stenning.) (London, Bles, 1924.)

A good account of the older acting techniques by one of the world's greatest actresses.

COQUELIN, CONSTANT. *The Art of the Actor*. (Tr. by Elsie Fogarty.) (London, Allen & Unwin, 1925.)

The essay that stirred up the great controversy in the 'eighties.

LUTZ, FLORENCE. *The Technique of Pantomime*. (Berkeley, Cal., Sather Gate Book Shop, 1927.)

An appallingly thorough exposition of synthetic acting techniques, for those who believe in old-school methods. Catalogues the physical expressions for hundreds of mental and emotional states.

STANISLAVSKI, CONSTANTIN. *An Actor Prepares*. (Tr. by Eliz. R. Hapgood.) (Theatre Arts, 1936.)

An illuminating text by the great Russian (whose translators cannot agree on the English spelling of his name).

BOLES LAVSKY, RICHARD. *Acting: The First Six Lessons*. (Theatre Arts, 1937.)

Stimulating but highly mystical essays by another eminent Russian.

BOSWORTH, HALLIAM. *Technique in Dramatic Art*. (Macmillan, 1926, 1934.)

Used as a text in many courses in acting.

SELDEN, SAMUEL. *A Player's Handbook*. (Crofts, 1934.)

One of the more popular elementary texts.

\*LEES, C. LOWELL. *A Primer of Acting*. (Prentice-Hall, 1940.)

Of similar scope, but somewhat different approach. Good bibliography.

(For other discussions of acting see the publications of the Dramatic Museum of Columbia University, especially WILLIAM GILLETTE's article, "The Illusion of the First Time," and the articles by COQUELIN, IRVING, BOVICCAULT, TALMA, and other actors. Numerous articles are to be found also in the periodicals, in addition to the ones mentioned below. Bits of very valuable material are tucked away in the biographies and autobiographies of actors and managers, of which there are literally hundreds. Among the best are those of CLARA MORRIS, MACREADY, SALVINI, FORREST, MRS. SIDDONS, BETTERTON (by Lowe), GARRICK (several), AUGUSTIN DALY, LESTER WALLACK, JOHN DREW, OTIS SKINNER, GEORGE ARLISS, and STANISLAVSKY. Many of the books listed above on theatre history contain side lights on the philosophy of acting.)

## DRAMATIC CONSTRUCTION AND PLAYWRITING

(Just as the playwright should learn all he can about the problems of acting, directing, and play mounting, so the director, who must often serve as play doctor, should learn all he can about playwriting—or “playwrighting” as the late Jesse Lynch Williams insisted it should be spelled.)

FREYTAG, GUSTAV. *The Technique of the Drama*. (Tr. by McEwen.) (Scott, Foresman & Co., 1894.)

World-famous, and the basis of most studies of play construction.

ARCHER, WILLIAM. *Playmaking*. (Small, Maynard, 1912.)

The first modern text, and still one of the best.

BAKER, GEORGE PIERCE. *Dramatic Technique*. (Houghton Mifflin, 1919.)

His famous course in playwriting in book form—minus the laboratory work.

KROWS, A. E. *Playwriting for Profit*. (Longmans, Green, 1928.)

Businesslike, realistic, and packed with information.

ROWE, KENNETH T. *Write That Play*. (Funk and Wagnalls, 1939.)

The most popular recent text for college classes.

WILLIAMS, JESSE LYNCH and others. *The Art of Playwriting*. (U. of Pennsylvania Press, 1928.)

A highly stimulating little book, containing lectures by Jesse Lynch Williams, Langdon Mitchell, Gilbert Emery, Lord Dunsany, and Rachel Crothers. Foreword by Arthur Hobson Quinn. Short, but very helpful.

## MISCELLANEOUS REFERENCE BOOKS

\*SOBEL, BERNARD. *Theatre Handbook and Digest of Plays*. (Crown Publishers, 1940.)

An invaluable encyclopedia of the theatre in one large volume. Neither exhaustive nor exact, but exceedingly useful. Excellent bibliography by George Freedley.

FOWLER, H. W. *Modern English Usage*. (Oxford, 1926.)

The indispensable book for settling difficult points of language. Erudite but not pedantic.

JONES, DANIEL. *An English Pronouncing Dictionary*. (Dutton, 1937.)

The ultimate authority on the London standard. Uses phonetic script.

KENYON, J. S., and KNOTT, T. A. *A Pronouncing Dictionary of American English*. (Merriam, 1944.)

One of the most up-to-date in its field; midwestern in standards. Uses phonetic script.

KANTNER, C., and WEST, R. *Phonetics*. (Harper, 1933, 1941.)

Perhaps the clearest and most useful book for the American student of pronunciation. Midwestern in standards.

MURDOCH, JAMES E. *The Technique of the Speaking Voice*. (Stephens, 1915.)

Based on Rush's *Philosophy of the Human Voice*. An old book, but a good one, by an actor whose own voice was one of the finest.

STANLEY, DOUGLAS, and MAXFIELD, J. P. *The Voice*. (Pitman, 1935.)

A somewhat controversial book, presenting a modern theory with many devotees.

CREWS, ALBERT. *Radio Production Directing*. (Houghton Mifflin, 1944.)

An admirable book, covering the problems of radio drama especially well.

HUBBELL, RICHARD T. *Television Programming and Production*. (Murray Hill Books, 1945.)

Probably the best book on this new art for students of the theatre.

EDDY, CAPT. WILLIAM C. *Television: the Eyes of Tomorrow*. (Prentice-Hall, 1945.)

New. Thorough. Accent on the technical side. Well illustrated.

#### PERIODICALS AND PERIODICAL ARTICLES

(Periodicals come and go; half of those listed in the first edition of this book are no longer published—though their back files contain many useful articles. Among the deceased ones worth looking up are the American *Theatre Magazine*; the English *Theatre Magazine*; the Drama League's organ, *The Drama*; the *Theatre Guild Magazine*, the shortlived *Stage*, and many pre-war European magazines. Many articles on theatre also appear in the popular general magazines. The student should be familiar with *The Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*, an annual index; also with *The Dramatic Index*, a specialized supplement, edited by F. W. Faxon, since 1909. Below are listed the periodicals most actively useful to students of the theatre at this writing; also a brief selection of articles thought to be helpful or stimulating in relation to the problems discussed in the present text.)

*Theatre Arts* (formerly *The Theatre Arts Monthly*). (New York.)

The indispensable magazine for students of the theatre. Published since 1916, its files constitute a comprehensive history of the modern theatre. It is lavishly and beautifully illustrated with fine half-tones, and its advertising columns are informative.

*The Quarterly Journal of Speech*. (National Association of Teachers of Speech. Office at the University of Missouri.)

Contains most of the articles on educational theatre since 1915.

*The Theatre Annual*. (New York, The Theatre Library Association.)

An annual publication, since 1942, of scholarly and historical studies.

*National Theatre Conference Bulletin*. (Cleveland, N. T. C. Office at Western Reserve University.)

A quarterly, primarily for members, but full of stimulating material for all workers in the non-commercial theatre.

*Dramatics* (formerly *The High School Thespian*). (College Hill Station, Cincinnati, O.)

An excellent publication at the high school level.

*Players Magazine*. (National Collegiate Players. Office at 2017 Bell Ave., Denton, Texas.)

Primarily for college and university theatres, but useful also to community groups. Well illustrated.

*Variety*. (New York.)

A comprehensive news-sheet of "show business" in all its forms, including radio, talking pictures, and television.

*Billboard*. (New York.)

The trade journal of the commercial theatre.

*Articles of Possible Special Interest:*

(*Q.J.S.* = *Quarterly Journal of Speech*. *T.A.* = *Theatre Arts*. *N.T.C.* = *Bulletin of the National Theatre Conference*.)

- Abbott, Hazel. "The Soviet Theatre—Acting and Staging." (*Q.J.S.*, Oct., 1937.)
- Adams, W. B. "Shakespearean Tradition in the Theatre." (*Q.J.S.*, Nov., 1930.)
- Angus, William. "Expressionism in the Theatre." (*Q.J.S.*, Nov., 1933.)
- Appia, Adolphe*. Excerpts and discussion of his work. (*T.A.*, Aug., 1932.)
- Brown, Gilmor. "The First 25 Years" (of Pasadena Playhouse). (*N.T.C.*, Apr., 1943.)
- Carrick, Edward. "The Theatre of Parma." (*T.A.*, Mar., 1931.)
- Clark, B. H. "The Theatre Under Your Hat." (*T.A.*, May, 1938.)
- D'Angelo, Evelyn. "Shaw's Theory of Stage Representation." (*Q.J.S.*, June, 1929.)
- Deeter, Jasper. "Letter from Hedgerow." (*N.T.C.*, Apr., 1942.)
- Dolman, John, Jr. "The Berea Players—An Appreciation." (*Q.J.S.*, Feb., 1924.)
- Dolman, John, Jr. "Educational Dramatics." (*Q.J.S.*, Apr., 1921.)
- Dolman, John, Jr. "Escapist Theatre in War Time." (*Q.J.S.*, Apr., 1944.)
- Dolman, John, Jr. "Hamlet with Thrills (the Bel Geddes *Hamlet*)." (*Emerson Q.*, Jan., 1932.)
- Dolman, John, Jr. "Jim Dandy, Pioneer." (*Q.J.S.*, Feb., 1944.)
- Dolman, John, Jr. "A Laugh Analysis of *The School for Scandal*." (*Q.J.S.*, Nov., 1930.)
- Eisenstein, Sergei. "Enchanter from the Pear Tree Garden." (*T.A.*, Oct., 1935.)
- Eustis, Morton. "Theatre with a Union Label." (*T.A.*, Nov., 1933, and Jan., 1934.)
- Eustis, Morton. "The Director Takes Command." (Symposium on methods of famous directors—3 parts.) (*T.A.*, Feb., Mar., Apr., 1936.)
- Fagin, Bryllion. "Meyerhold Rehearses a Scene." (*T.A.*, Oct., 1932.)
- Farjeon, H. "The Birth of The Playboy." (Account of the riots.) (*T.A.*, Mar., 1932.)
- \*Fletcher, I. K. "Edward Gordon Craig." (Bib. of his work.) (*T.A.*, Apr., 1935.)
- Freedley, George. "The N. Y. Public Library's Theatre Service." (*N.T.C.*, Dec., 1939.)
- Freedley, George. "The Theatre Has Swallowed a Tapeworm." (*N.T.C.*, Nov., 1943.)
- Geddes, Norman Bel. "Six Theatre Projects." (*T.A.*, Sept., 1930.)
- Graham, K. L. "Meyerhold and Constructivism." (*Q.J.S.*, Apr., 1943.)
- Green, Harriet. "Gilmor Brown's Playbox." (*T.A.*, July, 1935.)
- Green, Paul. "The Artist's Challenge." (*N.T.C.*, Oct., 1942.)
- Jones, Robt. Edmond. "Toward a New Stage." (*T.A.*, Mar., 1941.)
- Koch, Fred H. "Twenty-Five Years at Chapel Hill." (*N.T.C.*, June, 1944.)
- Lippman, M. "The Effect of the Theatrical Syndicate on Theatrical Art." (*Q.J.S.*, Apr., 1940.)
- Lomas, C. W. "The Psychology of Stage Fright." (*Q.J.S.*, Feb., 1937.)
- Mitchell, Lee. "Some Principles of Stage Fencing." (*Q.J.S.*, Dec., 1942.)
- Norvelle, Lee. "Trends of the American Theatre Since 1920." (*N.T.C.*, June, 1940.)

- Reinhardt, Max, 1873-1943. Obituary reviews of his work. (*T.A.*, Jan., 1944.)
- Rice, Elmer. "The Playwright as Director." (*T.A.*, May, 1929.)
- Saroyan, William. "Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning." (*T.A.*, July, 1941.)
- Saroyan, William. "How to See." (*T.A.*, Mar., 1941.)
- Saroyan, William. "Two Theatres." (*T.A.*, Nov., 1938.)
- Sheriff, R. C. "In Defense of Realism." (*T.A.*, Feb., 1930.)
- Sievers, D. W. "The Play Rehearsal Schedule and Its Psychology." (*Q.J.S.*, Feb., 1944.)
- Stainton, W. H. "Photography for the Non-Professional Stage." (*Q.J.S.*, Apr., 1941.)
- Stevens, T. W. "The Stage Without a Curtain." (*T.A.*, Feb., 1938.)
- Tait, Stephen. "English Theatre Riots." (*T.A.*, Feb., 1940.)
- Thorndike, Dame Sybil. "I Look at the Audience." (*T.A.*, Jan., 1932.)
- Torrence, Ridgeley. "Some Notes on the Negro Theatre." (*N.T.C.*, June, 1939.)
- Tyson, Raymond. "Acting for Radio." (*Q.J.S.*, Dec., 1939.)
- Voskovec, George. "Comedy Written and Comedy Improvised." (*N.T.C.*, Nov., 1943.)
- Whicher, George. "The Folger Shakespeare Library." (*T.A.*, Feb., 1932.)
- \*Williams, Loraine. "Published Shakespeare Music." (Bibliography.) (*Q.J.S.*, Nov., 1933.)
- Wyckoff, Alex. "Amateur Show Tonight—Place, Broadway." (*Q.J.S.*, Apr., 1943.)

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

The most comprehensive bibliography on the material side of the theatre is the one edited by W. B. Gamble for the N. Y. Public Library. It is especially rich in references outside the regular books and periodicals. Together with the bibliographies of Nicoll, Freedley, Allen, Neilson, Thorndike, and Sobel (mentioned above), it pretty well covers the field of theatre research. For research in dramatic literature and history, consult the major works in that field and the long series of bibliographies of the M.L.A. For theatre references in the periodicals, consult the *Dramatic Index* and the *Reader's Guide*. Lists of plays suitable for production are so temporary in usefulness that they are excluded here; the student should write for the annual catalogues of Samuel French (N. Y. and London), the Dramatists' Play Service (N. Y.), Walter H. Baker & Co. (Boston), Row, Peterson & Co. (Evanston), Longmans, Green & Co. (N. Y.), and any other publishers specializing from time to time in acting editions of plays. For current information concerning the purchase or rental of theatrical equipment, write for the catalogues of the advertisers. Brentano (N. Y.), with shops in many cities, carries especially large stocks of books on the theatre; so does the Drama Book Shop, 48 W. 52 St., N. Y. R. R. Dearden, of Jenkintown, Pa., does a large mail-order business in books of the theatre (new and used), and publishes an informative catalogue. For theatre material available in the libraries, consult Gilder and Freedley, *Theatre Collections in Libraries and Museums: An International Handbook* (1936). For a selected bibliography of 100 choice books on theatre, see Rosamond Gilder's *A Theatre Library*. For a comprehensive bibliography of drama in general, see Blanche Baker's *Dramatic Bibliography* (Wilson, 1933).

## Appendix

### A. EXCERPTS FROM PROGRAM NOTES

NOT all directors realize the extent to which the pleasure and appreciation of an audience may be enhanced by a few helpful program notes—explanatory, historical, critical, humorous, according to the nature of the play. Such notes are especially appropriate in community theatre work, and especially effective when the program is mailed to subscribers before the production. True, some people will never bother to read them, but those are the people whose appreciation is halfhearted anyhow; the real theatre-lovers do read them.

All of the following excerpts are from programs with which the author was in some way connected, as director, actor, publicity writer, or stage manager, and most of them refer to period plays, exotic plays, or experimental plays—the ones which gain most by program notes. One or two examples from popular comedy are included just to suggest that even in that field a production may be enriched by a bit of well-planted anticipation. Only notes about the play are reprinted here; in each case they were accompanied by the usual informal chatter about the players, the workers, the organization and its activities. Many other examples may be found in community theatre programs throughout the country, and a few in professional programs.

*From notes on A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM, May, 1933:*

"September 29, 1662: To the King's Theatre, where I saw A Midsummer Night's Dream, which I had never seen before, nor shall ever again, for it is the most insipid, ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life."

(Entry in the Diary of Samuel Pepys)

Despite Mr. Pepys, the play has been enormously popular since his time. Millions have seen or read it, and many of its lines and phrases have become familiar quotations. Among them are the expression "single blessedness" (from the lines of Theseus early in Scene 1); "The course of true love never did run smooth" (from Lysander's lines in Scene 1); "as gently as any sucking dove" (from Bottom's lines in Scene 2); "In maiden meditation, fancy free" (from Oberon's description of Queen Elizabeth in Scene 3); "Lord, what fools these mortals be!" (from Puck's lines in Scene 6); and the famous lines of Theseus in Scene 10, ending:

"The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,  
Doth glance from heav'n to earth, from earth to heav'n,  
And, as imagination bodies forth  
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing  
A local habitation and a name."

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* is often rearranged for production in such a way as to feature some star actress as Puck. Our version is based on the First Folio, and is substantially as Shakespeare left his own prompt-book. We play it with very few cuts,

with no star parts, and with a boy as Puck, and we try to play it as comedy. The mechanicals are always comic, but the lovers and the fairies are often sentimentalized, even to the omission of their best comedy lines; Oberon and Titania are often sweet, Theseus and Hippolyta innocuously dignified. We try to make them all lightly amusing, as befits the "airy nothings" of a dream—though we hope we have not lost the poetry. We admit that Shakespeare might be startled, if not shocked, at our scenery, but we believe he would approve our attempt to restore the comedy spirit. . . .

*From notes on THE RIVALS, February, 1934:*

*The Rivals* was the first play of Sheridan, and was originally produced at Covent Garden on January 17, 1775. It is a little rougher and more boisterous than *The School for Scandal*, and is more generally popular, though it lacks the high finish of the later work. These two plays, with Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*, are the masterpieces of the 18th-century comedy of manners; and the Players' Club is proud of having produced all three.

In the original version of *The Rivals*, Faulkland and Julia were the leading characters, and the audiences agonized over the ebb and flow of their romance with great intensity. Later, the comedy characters came to be emphasized and the parts of Faulkland and Julia were cut down; in the Joseph Jefferson version, which William Warren called "an interesting performance with Sheridan twenty miles away," Julia was left out altogether, and the part of Acres was fattened and padded to exploit the star. We have tried to restore some of the balance, and have brought Julia to life again; but we spare you some of her most harrowing scenes with Faulkland.

The frank artificiality of these plays is a bit startling to modern audiences not accustomed to them. They were written for large bare stages with painted wings and drops and little furniture; and were played in "the grand manner," with the actors facing the audience most of the time and declaiming their lines bombastically. Asides and soliloquies were spoken directly to the audience; the actor did not drop out of character, but the character stepped out of the play to confide in the audience with the utmost frankness. We shall try to recapture that pleasantly childish convention.

We have discarded many apocryphal lines and traditional bits of business not conceived by Sheridan, but have retained a few of the happiest, including Mrs. Malaprop's mistake in handing Captain Absolute the wrong letter (supposed to have been invented by Mrs. John Drew), the chore boy's line about kicking the cat, Bob Acres' curl papers, his last two lines in the challenge scene (probably invented by Jefferson), and much of the comic business between Sir Lucius and Acres in the last scene of the play.

The costume worn by Mrs. Malaprop is the property of Mrs. John Dolman, Sr., and was made for her mother, Mrs. E. J. Phillips, to wear in the same part at the Chestnut St. Theatre, Philadelphia, in 1877.

*From notes on THE DOVER ROAD, December, 1934:*

*The Dover Road* is one of the most popular and entertaining plays of that likable Scotchman, A. A. Milne, author of *The Romantic Age*, *Mr. Pim Passes By*, *The Perfect Alibi*, and many other plays, and author also of those charming books of poems for children, *When We Were Very Young*, *Now We Are Six* and *Winnie the Pooh*.

Like his compatriot, Sir James Barrie, he finds his best comedy material in the amiable follies and shortcomings of the English, and so appeals not only to the Scotch—and the Irish—but to the Americans as well. Like Barrie, also, he delights in



whimsical, even fantastic, twists of imagination; but unlike Barrie, he is never bitter. *Mr. Pim* and *The Dover Road* make gentle fun of human nature in general and English nature in particular, but they do not deliver the satirical wallop of *Mary Rose*, *Dear Brutus*, or *The Admirable Crichton*. Milne's plays may, for this reason, be less important than Barrie's, but they are none-the-less worth while, if only to remind us what a charming evening we can spend in the company of a humorist who is also unmistakably a gentleman.

To understand *The Dover Road* we must know that the phrase has an implication for the Britisher that may be unfamiliar to the American—an implication as definite as that which a Philadelphian would draw from "the road to Elkton," or that which any American would draw from "the road to Reno," yet different from either. Young folk take the road to Elkton to get married in a hurry, and the road to Reno to get unmarried in a hurry. But Londoners, married or unmarried, sometimes take the road to Dover as the quickest escape to a glamorous romance in the south of France. It is upon such persons that the amazing Mr. Latimer performs his strange experiments.

*From notes on TWELFTH NIGHT, February, 1935:*

Casual playgoers, to say nothing of scholars, have wondered what Shakespeare meant by his title for this play, since no reference to Twelfth Night is involved in the plot. But Twelfth Night, in Old England, was the night of mixed revels, of inconsequential entertainment, masquerade, and mischief. In the words of Hermann Conrad: ". . . When Shakespeare gave a title to the ripest fruit of his comic Muse, he had no intrusive, covert meaning; he wished to say merely,—'Herein are to be found comicalities of all kinds, braggadocios and chicken-hearted simpletons, roistering and revelling, ill-conditioned hypocrisy and intolerance, false love and true love, disguises and delusions and mad pranks. What to call it I know not. Call it a masquerade, a Twelfth Night, or whatever you like.'"

This explanation accounts, not only for the title, but for the loose construction and far-fetched improbability of the plot. What does it matter if we cannot wholly believe in Viola's disguise, in Olivia's love for Cesario, in her prompt acceptance of Sebastian as a substitute, in Orsino's blind acceptance of Cesario as a boy, and in Sebastian's inability to recognize his twin sister because she is dressed in boy's clothes? It never really happened, and we are not supposed to believe it. Like Malvolio's antics, "if this were played now upon a stage, I could condemn it as an improbable fiction." It is all a hodgepodge of foolishness, put together for our entertainment, seasoned with high comedy, low comedy, good humor, bad puns, roistering rowdiness, gentle dignity, fine poetry, false courage, and appalling inconsistency. It has no more serious intent than a musical comedy or extravaganza; yet it has a vitality that has kept it alive for 300 years in spite of the bookish, humorless scholars who have sometimes made its faults the more painful by explaining them away. Today it is one of the most popular plays in the repertoires of community theatres, and one of the most frequently reviewed of Shakespeare's plays on the professional stage.

We use our own text, based on the First Folio, but slightly rearranged for swifter action and fewer scene changes. Very few lines have been cut, but a number of obscure or obsolete words have been altered in the interest of clarity. We try to play it in the rollicking, carefree manner in which we think it was written, and if you do not catch that spirit we hope you will blame us and not the author.

You will hear some familiar lines or phrases: "She sat like Patience on a monument" . . . "If music be the food of love, play on!" . . . "Since before Noah was a sailor" . . . "Some are born great, some achieve greatness" . . . But why spoil all the fun of spotting them? It will help to make the language clear if you remember

that "still" means "always" in Elizabethan English; that "an" means "if"; that "cousin" may mean almost any relation; that a "galliard" is a kind of dance; that a "hart" is a kind of stag, though it sounds like "heart"; that a "catch" is a kind of song, often called a "round"; that a steward's "chain" is his badge of office; that to "gull" a person is to make a fool of him; that a "toy" is any kind of trinket, not necessarily for a child; that "shrew" is pronounced "shrow," and "shrewish," "shrowish." But do not try to understand the big words Sir Andrew uses; he does not understand them himself. He is doubtless the original from whom Sheridan got his suggestion for Mrs. Malaprop 175 years later; but he is even more the original of Bob Acres. It is interesting to note that in most acting editions of *Twelfth Night* Sir Andrew has a line ("Here I am!" said from an unexpected hiding-place) which Shakespeare never wrote, but which has been borrowed back from the corresponding scene (the duel scene) of *The Rivals*.

*From notes on THE INSPECTOR-GENERAL, May, 1936:*

It was in May, 1836, that the Russians had their first chance to laugh at the absurdities of Gogol's *Revizor* (known in English translations as *The Inspector-General*); and they have been laughing ever since, in company with the rest of the world. The one great full-length comedy to come out of Russia prior to the recent advent of *Squaring the Circle*, it has been translated into almost every modern language, and revived at frequent intervals in many countries. In May, 1936, the Players Club of Swarthmore honors the one hundredth anniversary of this lively old play by a fresh revival.

The world-wide popularity of *Revizor* is explained by its universality. In its provincial-minded, grafting, small-town politicians we recognize the characters we know in real life, exaggerated a bit and pilloried for their faults, but always in the spirit of fun, and without the slightest suggestion of preachment or propaganda. The story of how they lay themselves out to bribe, entertain and deceive the Inspector-General, only to find that they have wasted their efforts on the wrong man, amuses people of all races and ranks; and the surprise climax which brings down the final curtain rates as one of the really big moments in comic drama.

The production is directed by John Dolman, Jr., with the assistance of Benjamin Rothberg, a former Russian actor who has been a member of the Club for several years. Mr. Rothberg . . . came to the United States with the Moscow Art Theatre, and settled in Philadelphia, taking a degree from the University of Pennsylvania. He has played in *Revizor* in Russia, and knows the Russian text thoroughly; and his familiarity with the traditional methods of production has been invaluable to the director. He is seen in the part of Ossip, the serf, a part that would be especially difficult for an American actor because of the anomalous position of the old family servant who is virtually a slave, yet has certain privileges of familiarity.

. . . *Revizor*, or *The Inspector-General*, is contemporary with *The Pickwick Papers* of Charles Dickens, and like them is celebrating its centenary. Dickens, Gogol, and Abraham Lincoln were all of an age; they were born in 1809 and were twenty-seven in 1836. When *Revizor* was first played Andrew Jackson was President of the United States and Victoria was not yet Queen of England. Russia was an Empire, at odds with Turkey and suspicious of France. The Crimean War had not yet been fought, and serfdom still flourished. . . .

In the Russian theatre it is customary to lavish great care on characterization. Even the minor characters are studied for their full life history, and played with finish, often by the best actors. Stanislavsky, director of the Moscow Art Theatre, epitomized this attitude in his famous slogan: "There are no small parts; only small actors." The

Russians delight in ensemble scenes, where everybody speaks at once, as in real life; yet the main current of thought somehow comes clear. They also delight in humor that is unconscious on the part of the characters, no matter how preposterous. The characters in *Revizor* are amusing because of what happens to them and how they react to it. They do not try to be funny like the characters in American farce. Gogol emphasized this himself in his descriptions of the characters, which Mr. Rothberg has translated for us and which are posted on the lobby wall for the benefit of anyone especially interested.

The Russian names are of course confusing to Americans. Even close friends and relatives address each other by two names, the given name and the patronymic, strung together rapidly and contracted in pronunciation. Thus, "Peterewanich" (for Peter Ivanovich—Peter, son of John); "Ammosfedderich" (for Ammos Fyodorovich—Ammos, son of Fyodor, or Theodore), "Antonantonich" (for Anton Antonovich—Anton, son of Anton); "Maryantonovna" (for Marya Antonovna—Mary, daughter of Anton). Russian surnames are used less frequently, but are sometimes alarming in their consonantal complexities. The surnames in the play have character implications similar to those of Sir Toby Belch, Sir Anthony Absolute, Lady Sneerwell, Mrs. Malaprop, and hundreds of others in English comedy. "Zemlyanika" means "earthberry" and suggests an ear to the ground. "Schpekin" suggests a foppish, prying person. "Khlopov" means "blinker," and suggests timid uncertainty. "Skvoznik-Dmuchanovsky" suggests a shrewd rascal, and the "Dm" combination implies a trace of Polish ancestry. "Lyapkin-Tyapkin" suggests the pocket-slapping of the ready bribe-taker. "Ukhavyortov" suggests deafness, and implies that the Police Captain turns a deaf ear to complaints. "Svistunov" suggests the sound of a police whistle, and "Derzhimorda" means something very like "dead pan." As for "Bobchinsky" and "Dobchinsky," they may be appropriately translated as "Boppel" and "Babble." The audience can hardly be expected to catch all these implications, but they have been very helpful to the actors.

The text used is not the abbreviated one employed in most American productions, but an entirely new one prepared by the directors.<sup>1</sup> It is based directly on Gogol's own and follows it accurately in tempo and spirit, while translating it freely into colloquial American speech. The only liberties taken are a slight revision in the order of ideas to speed up the climax in Act V, and the inclusion of a little scene (the one between Khlestakov and Hübner in Act IV) written by Gogol, but not usually included even in Russian editions or productions.

Much of the "business" is traditional with the Russian companies, including the Governor's difficulty with his sword and hat, Khlestakov's hand-washing and tooth-picking, Bobchinsky's fall, Mishka's stupidities, Khlestakov's use of a lorgnette, his difficulties with the table, Svistunov's business with the note, the actions of the Locksmith's Wife, Ossip's business with the sugar loaf and wrapping, the Governor's gift of a rug to Khlestakov, and the handling of the letter in Act V. The tableau at the end is traditional, even to the characteristic attitudes of the various individuals, as described by Gogol himself.

### *From notes on THE ADMIRABLE CRICHTON, December, 1936:*

*The Admirable Crichton* is offered as a belated reply to the numerous Club members who have said to us from time to time: "Why don't you give us a Barrie play?" It is belated only because the high royalties on Barrie's plays and the difficulty of casting and mounting them have served as a strong deterrent, and not because the Cast Committee is in any way unappreciative of their appeal. We hope that the attendance on this one will justify us in trying others from time to time.

<sup>1</sup> Since published by Walter H. Baker, Boston.

If *The Admirable Crichton* is not the best of Barrie's plays it is certainly the wittiest and most skillfully written. The story of the perfect butler who becomes an equally perfect dictator when wrecked with his master's family on a desert island has become a world classic—not so much for the tragic theme (it all comes to nought when they get back to England) as for the charm and smoothness of the characterizations, and the fantastic absurdity of treatment which makes it a light comedy in feeling despite its underlying comment on human weakness. Barrie loves his weak characters, and most of them are weak; they are more to be pitied than scorned, and more to be liked than pitied. There are many fools, but few villains in Barrie's philosophy, and that makes his world a pleasant world to see on the stage.

We wish you could enjoy with the players the richly humorous stage directions which enliven the printed text. How can we convey to you his delicate remark that "Catherine is two years lazier than Agatha"; or his description of Lady Mary, who, if she chooses, "can make you seem so insignificant that you feel you might be swept away with the crumb-brush"; or his finger-post statement that "Lord Brocklehurst accepts his fate, but he still has an eye for Fisher, and something may come of this"; or that masterpiece of stage direction for a minor character: "The page-boy cheers, and has the one moment of prominence in his life. He grows up, marries and has children, but is never really heard of again"? In the last scene, Lady Mary says, "Do you despise me, Crichton?" and Barrie adds, "The man who could never tell a lie makes no answer." The implication is clear to the reader, and we shall try to convey that implication; though Walter Hampden, in the last great professional revival (apparently fearful of not being clear) said, "No, my lady,"—completely falsifying Barrie's meaning, and leaving the play without an ending. Except in a few matters of mechanics we are following the author's comments carefully, and if we fail to make his meanings clear it is solely because our skill is unequal to the task.

#### *From notes on THE CRADLE SONG, March, 1937:*

*The Cradle Song* is a most unusual play. It is the work of the Spanish dramatist Gregorio Martinez Sierra and his wife, Maria, lifelong collaborators, and authors of more than fifty plays of the most diversified character. It is the simplest, but the most universally successful of their plays.

Possibly no play in history has achieved such popularity with so little plot material and so little action. A baby girl is left at the door of a convent, and the sisters take her in; eighteen years later she goes out of their lives again to be married. That is all there is to the story. But the play is not in the story. It is in the effect of the episode on the lives and characters of the human beings involved; in the revelation and development of their feelings and sympathies. The charm and warmth and humor, and above all the naturalness of their behavior enlist the interest and friendship of all kinds of audiences everywhere. It is not a religious play. There is no hint of doctrine, or controversy, or propaganda of any kind. It is merely a study of human nature, with its homely virtues and homely follies, against a background of religious simplicity. It lets us see that nuns are people, in a way that might be true of cloistered people anywhere. That is what makes it equally pleasing to Protestant or Catholic, Agnostic or Jew.

#### *From notes on SQUARING THE CIRCLE, May, 1938:*

*Squaring the Circle* is a play about Communist youth in Soviet Russia, but is far from being Communist propaganda. It does serve to remind us that, however the conditions of life and the manners and customs of the people may vary under different

forms of government, human beings are just about the same everywhere. Now and then the antics of European dictators, Communist or Fascist, make us wonder whether all Europeans have lost their sense of humor. It is encouraging to find that the Russians have not. *Squaring the Circle*, even in its original version, takes many Communist fads and follies for a ride; and the fact that it had over fifteen hundred performances in Russia before it was translated into English would seem to indicate that the Russian people have not forgotten how to laugh, even at themselves.

The authorized English translation, by Malamuth and Lyons, is a little simpler and rather more farcical than the version you will see this evening. The American producer, Dmitri Ostrov, took a great deal of liberty with the text, adapting it to American audience reactions, and making it a bit more convincing as a character comedy. He built up the character of Emilian, who, in the original, is talked about a great deal but seen very little; and he practically created the character of Rabinovitch, who was originally just an off-stage voice. He toned down some of the boisterous nonsense which turned the original third act into a mere roughhouse, and tried to work out a more effective conclusion, trying out half a dozen different endings in Philadelphia and New York. But in the main he followed the spirit of the original, and if he did use one or two direct jokes on Communist dialectic that Kataev would hardly have dared to use, he is careful to have Novikov remind us frequently that "it will not hurt the Revolution." Our version is the Ostrov prompt-book, as published by French, with a few deletions and a few restorations from the authorized version.

Valentine Kataev, the author, is a newspaper reporter and a writer of Soviet propaganda—though you might not suspect it from this play.<sup>2</sup> He is also a novelist of some repute. . . . *Squaring the Circle* was written in 1928, eleven years after the October Revolution, and four years after Lenin's funeral, in which we are told that Tonya carried her red banner for five miles in a heavy blizzard.

To understand the background of the comedy you must realize that the young people of the Soviet Union are rigorously drilled in the doctrines of Karl Marx, Lenin, and other Socialistic writers on economic and social topics, and are expected to form their "ideology" on good Socialist "dialectic." The phraseology of these writers is to them as familiar and as important as the parables of Christ are to an American divinity student. They are taught to regard religion as "an opiate of the people," and God as "a medieval concept"; but they are also taught to base their conduct on a strict code of social ethics. Their ideology *is* their religion, but like other people they sometimes backslide a little, and have twinges of conscience to punish them.

*From notes on YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU, April, 1939:*

"The craziest play I ever saw in my life," said a Philadelphian who had been over to New York to see *You Can't Take It With You* when it was new. "That Sycamore family is the most idiotic bunch of nuts you can imagine—something like the family in *Hay Fever*, only more likable. It gave me the biggest evening of laughs I've had in years. But I don't see why it won the Pulitzer Prize. It certainly isn't literature, and it doesn't seem like great drama—it's too full of outright nonsense!"

Well, we don't know why it won the Pulitzer Prize either. But we are beginning to have an idea why it has such popular appeal—and it is not just the number of laughs. Almost everybody we talk to who has seen it says: "You know, my cousin's family is just like that," or, "I have an aunt who is Penelope Sycamore all over," or, "I think Essie's a scream; she reminds me of a classmate of mine that thought she could dance," or, "I met a fellow yesterday that was Mr. De Pinna to a T." When we sought to borrow properties, family after family said apologetically, "This room is in an awful

<sup>2</sup> Four years after this was written, Kataev was killed in action with the Red Army.

mess; you know we're as bad as the Sycamores—we collect junk, too." We did not find anybody who ate candy from a skull, but Swarthmore is well populated with families that have typewriters, musical instruments, easels, mechanical toys, and live pets in harmonious juxtaposition with multitudinous objects of (more or less) art. All in all, we suspect that this play hits a lot of people right where they live, and makes them laugh, not only at the Sycamores, but at themselves. And that does not hurt anybody. The world would be a lot better off if some of its most conspicuous leaders could learn to do just that.

*From notes on THE YELLOW JACKET, January, 1940:*

*The Yellow Jacket* is a very unusual play—unusual in its exotic story, its costumes, and its Chinese stage conventions. But the one thing about it that seems most unusual to modern American audiences is not, in the historical sense, unusual at all. That is the total absence of realism, the frank, childlike, "let's pretend" attitude with which the players make their appeal to our imagination. Such an attitude seems unusual to us because, for a mere century or so, we have been building up a cult of realism in the theatre, depending more and more on visual actuality, less and less on imagination. Perhaps we may enjoy *The Yellow Jacket* better if we remember that it is our way, not the Chinese, which is unusual. For three thousand years the world theatre has been conventional rather than realistic—in China, Java, Siam, India, in the Greece of Sophocles and Aristophanes, the England of Shakespeare, the France of Molière, and in the playrooms of children everywhere. It is only we, in our brief moment and our little corner of the world, who think that the theatre is meant to deceive the eye. And if we may judge by the recent craze for plays without scenery, even we are beginning to feel the call of the universal.

Of all non-realistic theatres, the Chinese has had the longest period of unbroken existence, and has built up the most elaborate and rigid system of conventions. These differ somewhat in different parts of China, and are more flexible in the popular theatre than in the classical, the latter being almost a combination of ballet and opera. Though *The Yellow Jacket* is only an imitation Chinese play, mixing ancient and modern themes, classic and popular characters, it employs many conventions that have been well established for centuries, and that are so familiar to Chinese audiences that they never give them a thought. When, for example, the property man holds a red flag before a character's face to indicate that the character has been beheaded, the Chinese audience does not laugh; it accepts the action as a mere symbol, just as we accept the word "beheaded" as a symbol for the same idea in speech or literature. When a character frankly addresses the audience and explains who he is and how he figures in the play the Chinese do not laugh; neither did the Greeks or Elizabethans, and neither did Americans as recently as 1850, or even 1890. When these things are taken for granted they become a part of the language of the theatre, a direct aid to the imagination, entertaining, but not ridiculous.

To help you to a clearer understanding of *The Yellow Jacket* we append a few notes on the principal conventions employed:

1. Scenery is imaginary, and properties largely symbolic. The setting merely suggests the interior of a Chinese theatre.
2. The window above the orchestra denotes Heaven; only spirits speak from it. The door on your right (stage left) is labelled "Entrance"; the one on your left "Exit." Some Chinese theatres reverse this; practice is not uniform. For further explanation of the word characters used on the stage see list posted in lobby.
3. The property man is not part of the play, and is not supposed to be seen; the Chinese audience ignores him completely.

4. When the good die, they "ascend to Heaven" on a visible ladder, and afterwards depart by the door; in the latter case they are not supposed to be seen. When the bad die, they depart by the door at once.

5. A whip indicates that the character is on horseback (the Chinese stage whip is a stick with four tassels eight or ten inches apart. The color of the tassels denotes the color of the horse). Held aloft, the whip indicates motion on horseback; swung backward from the wrist, reining in the horse; taken in the left hand, dismounting; thrown on the ground, the horse turned loose to pasture; handed to the property man, the horse being held; taken again in the right hand, remounting the horse.

6. An infant is symbolized by a stick of wood in a baby dress (which is much less suggestive of a corpse than the doll so often used in our plays).

7. The older male characters have painted faces to denote their traits. Symbolism in make-up includes black for uncouthness, white for wickedness, yellow for craftiness, blue for ferocity, red for loyalty, gold for good spirits, and green for evil spirits. Bits of paper hung from the ears symbolize disembodied spirits. Combinations of colors denote combinations of traits.

8. Costume symbolism is slightly different, and includes yellow for royalty, red for wealth (but also for dancing girls), blue for kindness and nobility, black for simplicity, white for extreme youth (but also for funerals), and brown for old age.

9. Red and green papers stand for messages, money, checks, visiting cards, etc.

10. Mountains, bridges, palaces, etc., are built out of tables, chairs, and stools.

11. Two yellow flags with wheels painted on them denote a chariot.

12. Other conventions will explain themselves, or will be explained by the Chorus—who, incidentally, is not truly Chinese, but a device of the American author to enhance the atmosphere of his play. In the real Chinese theatre the audiences need no explanation, and if place must be indicated, the property man holds up a sign. It is not hard, however, to conceive of the Chinese manager explaining his production to an American audience, and Chinese commentators have thought the device consistent with the spirit of their theatre.

The music used is not real Chinese music (which would be unintelligible to American audiences), but merely a rough suggestion to illustrate how important incidental music is to the Chinese play. Several of the themes are, however, real Chinese melodies, arranged for our purposes by the conductor.

### *From notes on WHAT A LIFE, December, 1940:*

*What a Life* opened on Broadway a little less than three years ago with Ezra Stone in the Henry Aldrich role. After a successful run it went on the road with one notable new face in the cast, that of Connie Nickerson, who but a few months before was acting on our own Players Club stage. Before long Henry Aldrich went on the air in a series of new adventures by the same author, Clifford Goldsmith. Now that *What a Life* is released for amateurs it is being done all over the country in high schools and little theatres, and everywhere audiences accept it with delight as their own.

Delaware Countians in particular may feel a more personal interest, for the author, Clifford ("Happy") Goldsmith, lived in the County not many years ago, and now lives near West Chester. At that time he was working for the Philadelphia Milk Fund, lecturing at local schools, including Swarthmore High School, and staging plays on the advantages of drinking milk. So the teachers and students in *What a Life* may well have been drawn from people we all know. At least we think you'll find them familiar.

*From notes on THE SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL, February, 1941:*

*The School for Scandal*, greatest of the 18th-century comedies of manners, was first performed at the famous Drury Lane Theatre, in London, on May 8, 1777. The stage of that theatre, like others of its time, was very large. Almost half of it was apron, or forestage, in front of the main curtain, and accessible through proscenium doors, right and left, when the curtain was down. Scenery was very simple, and was confined to the inner stage. Most plays of the period were written in alternate scenes, some requiring the full stage with scenery and furniture, others (usually shorter) requiring little or no furniture, and intended to be played on the forestage in front of the curtain, while the setting of the inner stage was being changed. In *The School for Scandal*, all the scenes at Sir Peter's and the two brief scenes in Charles's hallway were so played, the characters entering and leaving by the proscenium doors. The remaining scenes were played at full depth with the curtain up. A bare minimum of necessary furniture was used, and such things as windows, library books, framed portraits—and sometimes even extra chairs—were painted on the back drop. Lacking a forestage, we have been unable to follow the original method exactly, but we have tried to preserve something of its swiftness and frank artificiality by means of a formalized unit setting. There will be only one long intermission; between scenes the curtain will fall for a brief moment only, to permit some slight change in the indication of place, or merely to denote a passage of time.

Acting, in 1777, was, of course, more artificial and declamatory than modern acting, in keeping with the elaborate dress, manners, and language of the time. Fewer properties were used; there was less naturalistic stage "business"; the actors remained standing a greater portion of the time, and faced the audience more continuously; there were more conventional "crosses," with the speaker of the moment taking the center position in the triangle; and the many asides and soliloquies in which the old dramatists indulged so freely were spoken directly and frankly to the audience. To a modern audience the latter convention is the most disconcerting, since it does some violence to our notion of consistency in illusion. But the old comedies would not be themselves without the asides, so our actors will speak them as they were meant to be spoken—not to themselves, but to you. Remember that these asides represent not an actor stepping out of character, but a character stepping out of the play to confide in the audience. And remember that this convention has prevailed, in the drama of many countries, for three thousand years, while the consistent realism which seems more natural to us has prevailed for less than fifty.

The language of *The School for Scandal* has presented many interesting problems. London society at the time affected many French and Italian words and phrases, with an attempt at their original pronunciations. To suggest this, we use the foreign sounds in some cases for words that have since been Anglicized. We make no attempt to imitate what is today known as a British accent, since most of that has arisen since Sheridan's time, but we do try to avoid the most obtrusive Americanisms. The word "either," which occurs frequently in the play, raises the old question of *ee* or *eye*. A dictionary published in London in 1787 declares that the pronunciation *eyether* is affected by "certain classes," but that "*eether*" is preferred by the better educated and is recommended "if for no other reason than that it is the choice of that master of English speech, David Garrick." Following this hint, our players say *eether*, except Trip, who says *eyether*. Another word which may raise a question is "doubt"—"I doubt I love her" meant "I suspect I love her" in 1777.



*From notes on THE FARMER'S WIFE, April, 1942:*

*The Farmer's Wife* is a comedy for those who enjoy heart-warming chuckles. It is about real human beings. Some of them are witty, some temperamental, some lovable. Most of them are amusing without knowing it. They are characters rather than caricatures. They do and say absurd things (don't we all?); but they do not appear in their underwear, or say "goddam," or get drunk, or throw pies, or talk smut, or do any of the conventional things by which the masters of "show business" get sure-fire laughs when they haven't any better ideas. It is a play of wit and humor, of life, love, and laughter, with no stale jokes and practically no hokum—not even a mortgage foreclosure.

It is all about a thrifty farmer—a "widow-man"—and his family, friends and neighbors. His daughters are at the marriageable age: Petronell, "a thought fiery and masterful, you know," and Sibley, "a quiet little go-by-the-ground girl." Afraid of loneliness, he decides to marry again, makes a list of prospects, and proposes to them one after another, choosing the wrong time and the wrong words for each. Meanwhile Petronell has her troubles with Richard, who doesn't propose, and George, who doesn't do anything else; while Araminta, the housekeeper, gives aid and comfort to all but herself, and Churdles Ash keeps up a running fire of witty but cynical comment. At Miss Tapper's party we meet "all the world and his wife," including the outspoken Uncle Henry, the dignified Vicar, the hysterical postmistress, the fox-hunting Widow Windeatt, and many others. But it is not until the fourth lady on the list has said "no," and Farmer Sweetland has discovered that "there's no place like the lonely seashore to show you what a poor thing you are," that he finally discovers the best and simplest solution to his problem.

*The Farmer's Wife* is an English play, but not at all what most Americans expect an English play to be. The scene is Devonshire, which, of course, is in the "west country," close to Cornwall. The dialect is more like the Welsh, or even the Irish, than like that of London; in some respects it is more American than English; and the characters are not unlike those of rural America, especially in those regions settled by the English. Devon men have been seafaring men since the time of Sir Francis Drake, and many a Devon man settled in New Jersey or Massachusetts. Plymouth in Massachusetts was named after Plymouth in Devon. It is not strange, therefore, that we, and they, say *laff* and *after*, though the Londoner says *lahff* and *ahfter*; that we, and they, say *dearr* and *fourr*, instead of *deah* and *faw*. Up-country Devonshire is pretty thick, and would hardly be understood even if we could learn to speak it, but with the aid of a most obliging Devonshire man, an officer on H.M.S. *Furious*, we have tried to capture a few of the most characteristic sounds and idioms, just to give the play a proper flavor. Thus you will hear *you'm* for *you're*, *they things* for *those things*, *gwaine* for *going* and *Jarge* for *George*; and you will hear *aout*, *abaout* and *daown* pronounced in the Philadelphia way, only more so.

We are sorry, indeed, that Lieutenant Reed had to sail without seeing our production. We wish him the best of luck wherever duty may take him.

*From notes on two productions of JIM DANDY, January, 1942, and January, 1943:*

(1942)

*Jim Dandy* is a very remarkable play, offered under very unusual circumstances. The author is a highly successful and much-discussed playwright, the only one ever

to win the Pulitzer Prize and the Drama Critics Award for the same play (*The Time of Your Life*). Among his other successes are *My Heart's in the Highlands*; *Love's Old Sweet Song*, and *The Beautiful People*. All of his plays have been startlingly original in character, so much so that some outraged critics have thought the author insane. Others call him the greatest genius the American theatre has yet produced.

Mr. Saroyan is the first of four famous playwrights (the others being Paul Green, Christopher Morley, and Maxwell Anderson) to offer a new play through the National Theatre Conference for production in the little theatres of the country in advance of a Broadway opening. *Jim Dandy* is being given this season in about fifty theatres from coast to coast; but ours is, we believe, the first production scheduled in the immediate vicinity of Philadelphia.

*Jim Dandy* we recommend only to those who are open-minded about new things, who like a touch of mysticism, a touch of poetry, and a touch of color; who appreciate good music, and who are not afraid of abstraction. We do not guarantee that anybody will like it; all we know is that other audiences *have* liked it, and that it has been playing to packed houses. . . .

But, you ask, what sort of a play is *Jim Dandy*? What is it like? Answer: It is like nothing else you have ever seen!

Roughly, it is an attempt to do, with actors, properties, color, light, music, and movement on the stage, what a composer of music does with melody, harmony and rhythm; or what a non-realistic painter does with geometric line, mass and color, or with unrelated bits of reality assembled in illogical but artistic forms; or what a poet does when he substitutes the intuitive truth of a dream for the rationality of science—namely, to reflect the experiences of life, not as a photographer sees them, but as a more or less abstract succession of moods, memories and emotions, composed into a beautiful entity.

In one important respect *Jim Dandy* differs from current surrealistic painting. Most of the so-called surrealists are also sadists, fond of dismembered human bodies and ugly, abnormal, slimy things, and obsessed with Freudian psychology. Saroyan is much pleasanter, and *Jim Dandy* contains a very satisfying balance of humor, pathos, romance, tragedy, and resignation, and leaves one with a warm glow and a comforting sense of human kindness and dignity. It has deep and moving implications, but is never lugubrious or depressing.

Perhaps the best way to grasp the intent of the play is to compare it with a symphony. Like most symphonies it contains four movements (scenes). The first is mainly concerned with establishing an atmosphere and giving out certain themes (such as Fishkin's "It wouldn't help," Flora's "Mustn't laugh in the public library" and Johnny's "one foot in the grave"); it ends with climax, plus anticipation, on the entrance of Jim Dandy. The second scene, as in most symphonies, is the slowest and quietest, centering on what one producer has daringly called "the most beautiful love scene ever written." The third is the liveliest and most complex, and feeds almost directly into the fourth, which rises to the highest climax of poetic force and imagination, and ends with dignity and cheerful resignation. Like a symphony, *Jim Dandy* tries to epitomize the truths of the human spirit, but not to describe the facts of life with scientific accuracy.

(1943)

*Jim Dandy* is a play about very ordinary people—rather oddly assorted, to be sure, and brought together somewhat illogically in what purports to be a public library; but still very like ourselves, especially in their loves, and quarrels, and humors, and sympathies, and in their eager groping for something better. It is non-realistic only in

the sense that the author ignores the logic of time, place, and sequence of events—just as our subconscious minds instinctively do in our dreams. In every other sense it is highly realistic, very American, very contemporary, very democratic, and very human.

Only one character, Molly, is at all mystical. Seen first as an old woman in black rags, going endlessly about in a revolving door, she turns out later to be spectacularly different. One member of our audience last year thought she symbolized a nun, hovering on the edge of life, uncertain whether she belonged in, or out. Others thought she symbolized futility, or confusion, or aimless despair, galvanized into hope at the advent of Jim Dandy.

In Fishkin we all recognize the boundless longing of the human spirit for higher things—frustrated by weakness and failure, but ready to soar to unknown heights at the prompting of a more cheerful spirit. In Jock we see the changeable, impatient temperament, always complaining that “this book is ridiculous,” but optimistic enough to believe that the next one will be better.

Johnny, with one foot in the grave, is the disillusioned young man, a bundle of contradictions, deeply in love with Flora, but perversely afraid to admit it; believing the worst of all things, and depressed with the thought that he, like all of us, is slowly dying, yet wanting to go with Flora and look at flowers, hear bells and face with her the snow and the rain; trying to be tough, but showing kindness and compassion in spite of himself. Flora is the ordinary “young woman from way back,” holding down a job, mildly fancying herself as Cleopatra or Mae West, sincerely in love with Johnny, but almost as timid about admitting it. And little Johnny, their son, is like his father—not only in the visible symbol of a foot in a casket, but in the thoughts that run through his head about flowers, and bells, and snow, and rain.

In Jim Crow we see one of the most lovable types of human beings; not very brilliant, happy to bask in reflected glory, but unselfish, faithful, and strangely dignified in his humility.

As for Jim Dandy, like many who pretend to greatness, he is nothing in himself—a mere stuffed shirt. Saroyan describes him as “a bum with manners.” Yet he is wise enough and kind enough to discern the greatness in others, and is at his own best in his moments of service to them. “Your name is Jim Dandy,” he says to Fishkin; “we’re all the same.”

“It doesn’t matter who’s handy,  
Who’s lean or fat, father or son.  
Every living man is Jim Dandy.  
All who breathe are one.”

And when you stop to think of it, even the setting Saroyan prescribes isn’t as queer as it looks. You ask why the stairways don’t go anywhere—but aren’t there many such in real life, figuratively speaking? You ask why the characters must get all tangled up in an unnecessary revolving door—but did you ever watch people doing it in real life? A revolving door confuses the stupid, delays the impatient, is accepted calmly by the conventional, and is by-passed by the rebellious or sophisticated; it is a symbol of our over-elaborate civilization, and also a remarkable device for sorting and labeling human character. You ask why the noisy cash register—but what could summarize more simply and eloquently a large part of modern life?

William Saroyan, the author of *Jim Dandy*, is probably the most talked-of person in the theatre today. An American of Armenian descent, he was born in California in 1908, and has done most of his writing since 1934. He has written innumerable short stories, chiefly about the poorer classes in San Francisco, treating them with the

same sympathy and understanding with which O. Henry treated the four million of New York, but in a style of writing all his own.

Saroyan has little academic background (though he is obviously a great reader) and there is nothing literary or "highbrow" about him. He is interested chiefly in the poor and unsuccessful, most of his stories dealing with the backwash of humanity in the saloons and dives of San Francisco—people he seems to know well. He is aware of reality, and calls a spade a spade, yet he is surprisingly decent and never gratuitously shocking. His sympathies are clearly with the underdog, but his attitude is that of a lover of humanity and not of a political reformer. He finds dignity, humor, and beauty in the most lowly characters and the most astonishing places. He writes with great speed and apparently with slapdash carelessness; yet on careful analysis we find every part of his plays related most ingeniously to every other part. He has some affectations and a good-natured egotism; but he also has one of the most dynamically wide-awake minds in the world today.

(Excerpts from press comments and personal letters on last year's production of *Jim Dandy*)

GUY MARRINER, internationally known pianist, radio commentator and lecturer on music appreciation, now in the U. S. Army Air Force, wrote:

"It is rather hard to get away from *Jim Dandy*. Not that one wants to. . . . The sincerity of it got me so deeply that I simply have to write and say so. In other words, you gave me just about as inspiring and satisfactory an evening in the theatre as I can remember."

W. L. H. BUNKER, drama columnist of the Philadelphia Record, wrote in his column on Feb. 9, 1942:

"Anyone who had the opportunity but failed to see *Jim Dandy*, William Saroyan's new 'non-realistic, experimental play,' given its first Philadelphia showing by the Swarthmore Players Club Friday and Saturday last, missed one of the most unusual and most exciting adventures in little theatre. Quite apart from whether this is even 'a play' in the accepted sense of the word, too much credit can't be given to this group for their courage and imagination in giving it a hearing or for their splendid production under the direction of John Dolman, Jr., with such a swell, appropriately witty setting by Barbara Dolman Spencer.

"A few lines from the program notes hit the nail squarely on the head, so far as the play is concerned: 'I don't know what it is all about, but I like it. It is queer, but fascinating; moving, but pleasant; mystifying, but certainly not dull. Maybe I'm crazy, or maybe the author is, but any way, I like it.' In some ways it reminded me of the wilder flights of many of the ultra-modern composers—Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Bela Bartok—but all through it, one thought was uppermost in my mind—'This may not make sense, but it's doggedly entertaining.'

"The casting struck me as perfect, with special mention going to Barbara Dolman Spencer as 'a young woman from away back,' Paul Campbell as 'a young man with one foot in the grave,' Neal Gallagher as 'a newcomer, their son,' and Philip R. Whitney as 'a pessimist,' whose tremendous scene at the end of the play was done superbly."

LEE NORVELLE, president of the National Theatre Conference, speaking of the play (not of our production), wrote:

"Requests for repeat performances have come from audiences throughout the country. We did an unusually heavy box office for the play here (in Indiana), and have had a number of requests for a repeat performance. . . . A business man told me the other day that he remembered the play more vividly than any he had ever seen, and

sincerely hoped we would do it again soon. It seems to make an indelible impression. I would rather revive it than any play I have ever directed."

## B. SAMPLE WORKING PLOTS

PLAYS vary so much in their requirements that no uniform type of cue sheet or work sheet will do for all. The following samples, chosen from contrasting types of plays, may help to suggest the importance of good organization back stage. They are all from a community theatre, where all hands are willing to work on whatever is to be done; in the commercial theatre union rules would forbid the overlapping functions, and require "featherbedding" the crews to twice the size. A grip could not lend a hand to a flyman, or vice versa. Each of these plots was successfully worked, with the number of hands indicated, and without overworking anybody.

### *A work sheet for THE RIVALS:*

(Setting as shown in Plate 30. The ten changes were so simple in this case that individual work sheets were not needed; this is the master sheet. The stage manager and five hands made the changes in a few seconds each.)

WORK SHEET

Act	Sc.	Locality	Set	C. Panel	Ends	Other Flats	Furniture
I	1	Street in Bath	A	Gate	Out	Two bushes	None
	2	Mrs. Malaprop's	B	Closet	In	None	Blue & gold sofa, table, 2 ch.
II	1	Capt. Absolute's	C	Swords	In	None	Table, red c., 2 l. b. ch.
	2	Street in Bath	A	Gate	Out	Two bushes	None
(Intermission, eight minutes. No change)							
III	1	Street in Bath	A	Gate	Out	Two bushes	None
	2	Julia's	D	Mirror	In	None	Y. dressing table, 2 gold ch., gold stool
	3	Mrs. Malaprop's	B	Closet	In	None	Blue & gold sofa, table, 2 ch.
	4	Bob Acres'	E	Fireplace	In	None	Green dressing table, brown stool, 3 ch., green covers, writing table
(Intermission, eight minutes. Change)							
IV	1	Mrs. Malaprop's	B	Closet	In	None	Blue & gold sofa, table, 2 ch.
	2	Street in Bath	A	Gate	Out	Two bushes	None
V	1	Julia's	D	Mirror	In	None	Yellow & gold set as before
	2	King's Mead Field	F	Open	Out	3 trees	None

### *A working plot for THE FARMER'S WIFE:*

(Setting as diagrammed in Fig. 14. There were only two sets, and two changes, the second reversing the first. They were plotted for six hands, with the stage manager supervising. The back wall of each set was battened together and flied, with counterweights. The set for Acts I and III was 12 feet high; that for Act II was 14. The sky drop was used with both, with a change in the ground-rows. The side walls of

the 12-ft. set were left standing behind the walls of the other, except that T-25 was hinged to open for moving furniture on and off. The change was made without hurry in six minutes.)

MASTER WORK SHEET

(Plotted for six hands. A and B are primarily flymen; A is curtain-man also. C and D are primarily grips. E and F are primarily prop men, to carry furniture and assist the prop mistress.)

*First change (between Acts I and II)*

1. A and B raise ceiling piece to 16 ft.
2. C and D remove L.C. backing (T-18, T-23, T-19, T-5).
3. A and B remove R (outdoor) backing and stack against T-13.
4. C and D remove braces and unlash back wall. D takes braces and C goes to help on lines.
5. A, B, and C fly back wall (watch border lights).
6. D opens hinged flat down L. (T-25).
7. C brings on fireplace backing L. and places it.
8. F removes flower pots from window sills to mantel shelf L.
9. E takes off two small chairs from R. of table and brings on piano stool and small gilt chair.
10. F takes off two small chairs from L. of table and brings on two small chairs for L.
11. E takes off arm chair R. and small table C. (to R.).
12. F takes off small chair and arm chair L.
13. E and F carry on large gilt table (L-3) and carry off large table (C.) to L.
14. E and F carry on sofa (R.) and carry off sideboard (to R.).
15. E and F carry on organ and carry off Act I rugs.
16. E and F carry on Act II rugs.
17. E and F carry on ottoman.
18. E carries on small gilt table to L.
19. F carries on two small chairs to L.
20. E carries on small drop leaf table to R.C.
21. F carries on small drop leaf table to L.C.
22. E carries on stool to behind table L.
23. E and F report to property mistress for final adjustments of furniture, pictures, etc.
24. A and B remove flat T-3 from R.
25. A and B set flats A-26, A-1, A-2, A-8, right.
26. C and D set flats A-3, A-4, A-27, A-23, left.
27. A and B lower back wall of A set (wait till heavy furniture is on).
28. C and D brace and lash it.
29. A and B place backing for door down R.
30. C and D place backing for door up L.
31. C and D change ground row for Act II.
32. A and B lower ceiling, while B and C adjust it.
33. C checks tormentors.
34. D checks fireplace and all sight lines and joints.

*Second change (between Acts II and III)*

1. A and B raise ceiling.
2. C and D remove backing from door up L.
3. A and B remove backing down R.
4. C and D unlash and unbrace back wall. D takes braces and C goes to help on lines.
5. A, B, and C fly back wall.

6. C and D strike flats A-23, A-27, A-4, A-3, left.
7. A and B strike flats A-8, A-2, A-1, A-26, right.
8. C removes fireplace backing (A) left.
9. D resets hinged flat down L.
10. A and B reset flat down R. (T-3).
11. A and B reset outdoor backing R.
12. E takes off piano stool and gilt chair (to R.) and brings on two small chairs to R.C.
13. F takes off two chairs from L. and brings on two small chairs to L.C.
14. E takes off small drop table R.C. (to R.).
15. F takes off small drop table L.C. (to L.).
16. E and F carry off ottoman and carry on large table to C.
17. E and F carry off large gilt table to L.
18. E and F carry off organ and carry on sideboard R.
19. E and F carry off sofa R.
20. E carries on arm chair R. and carries off gilt table L.
21. F carries on arm chair L. and carries off stool L.
22. E carries on extra small chair (to L-1) and small table C.
23. E and F carry off Act II rugs and carry on Act I rugs.
24. E and F report to property mistress for final placing.
25. A and B lower back wall (T-set).
26. C and D shove it forward, lash and brace it.
27. C and D set L.C. backing (T-18, T-23, T-19, T-5).
28. A and B lower ceiling.
29. C and D guide it.
30. C checks tormentors.
31. D checks joints, sight lines, etc.

## WORK SHEET FOR A

*First change:*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. Raise ceiling to 16 ft. (front lines). | 5. Help B set A-26, A-1, A-2, and A-8, R.     |
| 2. Remove backing R.; stack against T-13. | 6. Help lower back wall when furniture is on. |
| 3. Help B and C fly back wall.            | 7. Set backing for door R.                    |
| 4. Help B remove T-3 from R.              | 8. Help B lower ceiling.                      |

*Second change:*

- |   |                                     |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Raise ceiling (front lines).         | 5. Reset T-3, down R.               |
| 2. Remove backing down R.               | 6. Reset outdoor backing, R.        |
| 3. Help B and C fly back wall.          | 7. Help B lower back wall of T-set. |
| 4. Strike flats A-8, A-2, A-1, A-26, R. | 8. Help B lower ceiling.            |

## WORK SHEET FOR C

*First change:*

- |   |                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Help D remove T-18, T-23, T-19, T-5.                   | 5. Help set A-3, A-4, A-27, A-23, L. |
| 2. Remove braces on back wall; give to D; unlash corners. | 6. Help D brace and lash back wall.  |
| 3. Help A and B fly back wall.                            | 7. Help D place backing up L.        |
| 4. Bring on fireplace backing, L, and place it.           | 8. Change ground-rows.               |
|   | 9. Guide ceiling into place.         |
|   | 10. Check tormentor trim.            |

*Second change:*

1. Help D remove backing up L.
2. Remove braces on back wall; give to D; unlash corners.
3. Help A and B fly back wall.
4. Help D strike A-23, A-27, A-4, A-3, L.
5. Remove fireplace backing, L.
6. Help D brace and lash back wall.
7. Help D set T-18, T-23, T-19, T-5 at L.C.
8. Help D guide ceiling.
9. Check tormentor trim.

## WORK SHEET FOR E

*First change:*

1. Take off 2 small chairs R. of table; bring on piano stool and small gilt chair.
2. Take off armchair R. and small table up C. (to R.).
3. Help F take on large gilt table and take off large table C. (to L.).
4. Help F take on sofa R., and remove sideboard (to R.).
5. Help F carry on organ; carry off rugs.
6. Help F take on rugs.
7. Help F take on ottoman.
8. Take on small gilt table to L.
9. Take on small drop-leaf table to L.C.
10. Take on stool to behind table L.
11. Report to prop mistress for final placing of props.

(Second change reversed this; B, D, and F had very similar work sheets.)

*A light cue sheet for JIM DANDY:*

(To be used with the board plot shown in Fig. 15.)

## JIM DANDY—LIGHT CUE SHEET

*Before start:* Set up and check from Light Plot (I). See that beam lights (D.W.1, D.W.2) and foots (D.W.5, D.R.5, D.B.5) are at zero. Bring foots up slowly, whites first, starting at 1" on record. House down slowly starting at ½" on record. Cut switch on last note. Beams up with curtain.

*Scene 1*

p. 12. CUE: Jim Dandy goes up c. D.B.4 up gently to 10.

*Between scenes*

No change, except that beams go down and up with curtain.

Foots stay on, house off.

*Scene 2*

p. 21. CUE: Jim Crow starts to play piano. Start dimming D.B.4, D.R.3, to reach zero in ten seconds.

CUE: Flora comes down to Johnny. Dim D.B.3 gently to zero. Then dim D.W.3 and D.W.4 slowly to 4.

p. 27. CUE: As Johnny says, "Seek no longer, as I no longer seek." Bring D.W.3, D.W.4 up gently to 10.

CUE: As Flora exits. D.B.4 up gently to 10.

p. 28. CUE: Curtain cue. Beams down with curtain. House up gently (5 sec.). Foots down. Work lights on. Stage main off.

*Between acts (12 min.)*

Reset board from light plot (II). See that beams and foots are down before stage main goes on. Work lights off. Start foots at 1½" on record (reds only). Start house down at ¾". Beams up with curtain (to 6 only).

*Scene 3*

p. 30. CUE: Entrance of Little Johnny. Start sneaking D.B.5 and beams up slowly.



p. 33. CUE: Jim Crow starts up steps. D.B.3 up gently to 5. Then sneak D.R.3, D.R.4 up slowly to 10.

p. 35. CUE: As boy is lifted up. D.B.3 up gently to 10.

p. 38. CUE: As Johnny starts to play. Start D.W.3, D.W.4 up slowly to 4, D.W.5 to 6.

CUE: Entrance of Jock. D.W.3 and D.W.4 up to 10.

p. 42. CUE: As Jock says, "It comforts me, that's why." D.B.4 up gently to 10 and D.B.3 to 6.

p. 46. CUE: Fishkin mounts table. Dim beams and D.W.3, D.W.4 gently (5 sec.) to 0.

p. 51. CUE: Fishkin descends. Beams, D.W.3, D.W.4 up slowly (4 sec.) to 10.

#### *Between scenes*

Foots stay on. House stays off. Beams down and up with curtain. D.B.4 down to 5.

#### *Scene 4*

p. 61. CUE: As Flora enters. D.B.5 up smoothly (3 sec.) to 10. Then D.B.4 up gently to 10.

#### *On curtain*

Hold all lights for curtain call, except that beams go down and up with curtain. After call, house lights up in 5 seconds. Foots off. Work lights on. Cut stage main.

### *Music plot for THE SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL:*

(Played from recordings. Operator gets warning cues from the prompter, but takes own starting and volume cues.)

#### LIST OF SELECTIONS

1. OVERTURE: MARRIAGE OF FIGARO (Mozart)
- PROLOGUE. Spoken before curtain
2. 18th-CENTURY DANCE (Haydn)
- ACT I. Scene 1. (Lady Sneerwell's Boudoir)
3. HARPSICHORD SUITE, PART I (Handel)
- Scene 2. (Sir Peter Teazle's)
4. HARPSICHORD SUITE, PART III—First 2"
- ACT II. Scene 1. (Sir Peter Teazle's)
5. MOTO PERPETUO (Paganini)
- Scene 2. (Lady Sneerwell's Parlor)
6. HARPSICHORD SUITE, PART II
- Scene 3. (Sir Peter Teazle's)
7. HARPSICHORD SUITE, PART III—Last 1 1/4"
- ACT III. Scene 1. (Sir Peter Teazle's)
8. SHEPHERD'S HEY—First 2"
- Scene 2. (Charles's Hallway)
9. SHEPHERD'S HEY—Last 2"
- Scene 3. (Charles's Dining Room)
- (INTERMISSION, 10 Min.)
10. PRELUDE: PETITS RIENS—GAVOTTE (Mozart)
- ACT IV. Scene 1. (Portrait Gallery)
11. SHEPHERD'S HEY—First 2"
- Scene 2. (Charles's Hallway)
12. MINUET (Boccherini)

- Scene 3. (Joseph's Library)  
 13. DANCE OF THE FURIES (Gluck)  
 ACT V. Scene 1. (Joseph's Library)  
 14. HARPSICHOORD SUITE, PART IV  
 Scene 2. (Sir Peter Teazle's)  
 15. DANCE OF THE FURIES  
 Scene 3. (Joseph's Library)  
 16. DANCE: COUNTRY GARDENS

MUSIC CUE SHEET

(Overture, Prelude, and final Dance start full volume. All others start with volume off, feed in very faintly, swell up on cue, play till curtain rises again; if not finished then, they fade down quickly, then fade out slowly.)

1. Overture starts full volume at 8:20. Call off inches.
2. Keep warmed up during Prologue.  
 NEEDLE CUE: "He'll fight—that's write . . ."  
 SWELL-UP CUE: ". . . is spilt for you!" Play till curtain.  
 FADE-DOWN CUE: Rise of curtain.  
 FADE-OUT CUE: ". . . with Captain Boastall?"
3. Ready p. 18. Start record p. 19. Music p. 20.  
 NEEDLE CUE: ". . . very hard for them to leave a subject . . ."  
 SWELL-UP CUE: "Sentiment!" Play till curtain rises.  
 FADE-DOWN CUE: Sir Peter's entrance.  
 FADE-OUT CUE: ". . . made me the happiest of men . . ."
4. Ready p. 21. Music p. 22.  
 NEEDLE CUE: "never be able to stand Noll's jokes."  
 SWELL-UP CUE: "punishment along *with it*." Play till rise.  
 FADE-DOWN CUE: Rise of curtain.  
 FADE-OUT CUE: "but I ought to have my own way."
5. Ready p. 24. Music p. 26.  
 NEEDLE CUE: Lady Teazle's exit.  
 SWELL-UP CUE: "plague and *torment* me." Play till rise.  
 FADE-DOWN CUE: Rise of curtain.  
 FADE-OUT CUE: ". . . very clever for an extempore."
6. Ready p. 32. Music p. 33.  
 NEEDLE CUE: ". . . your reasoning, I promise you" (exit).  
 SWELL-UP CUE: "exposed at last!" Play till rise.  
 FADE-DOWN CUE: Sir Oliver's entrance.  
 FADE-OUT CUE: ". . . husband at last!"
7. Ready p. 34. Music p. 36.  
 NEEDLE CUE: ". . . tell you our scheme."  
 SWELL-UP CUE: ". . . growth of the tree." Play till rise.  
 FADE-DOWN CUE: Entrance of Sir Peter.  
 FADE-OUT CUE: ". . . deserved misfortunes."
8. Ready p. 42. Music p. 44.  
 NEEDLE CUE: Exit of Lady Teazle.  
 SWELL-UP CUE: ". . . keep her temper" (second time). Play till rise.  
 FADE-DOWN CUE: Entrance of Trip.  
 FADE-OUT CUE: "To judge by the servants . . ."
9. Ready p. 44. Music p. 46.  
 NEEDLE CUE: ". . . post-obit on the blue and silver."  
 SWELL-UP CUE: "Egad, I heard the bell." Play till rise.

FADE-DOWN CUE: Rise of curtain.

FADE-OUT CUE: ". . . they won't drink wine!"

Repeat last  $\frac{1}{2}$ " at end of scene, p. 52.

NEEDLE CUE: ". . . you don't seem to like the business!"

SWELL-UP CUE: "Never! *Never!*" Play to end of record, full volume.

(INTERMISSION, 10 Min.)

10. Prelude at full volume throughout. Call off inches.

11. Ready p. 57. Music p. 59.

NEEDLE CUE: ". . . dunning you with the old proverb—"

SWELL-UP CUE: ". . . with the money." Play till rise.

FADE-DOWN CUE: Entrance of Moses.

FADE-OUT CUE: "And he games so deep."

12. Ready immediately. Quick change of record.

NEEDLE CUE: ". . . who, I'm sure, won't be paid . . ."

SWELL-UP CUE: "Moses, a *word*." Play till rise.

FADE-DOWN CUE: Curtain all the way up.

FADE-OUT CUE: ". . . I hope I may not lose the heiress . . ."

13. Ready p. 72. Music p. 73.

NEEDLE CUE: Exit of Lady Teazle.

SWELL-UP CUE: "Damn your *sentiments!*" Play till rise (short).

FADE-DOWN CUE: Rise of curtain.

FADE-OUT CUE: "Blockhead! To suppose that I . . ."

14. Ready p. 76. Music p. 78.

NEEDLE CUE: ". . . how impatiently you expect him."

SWELL-UP CUE: Fall of curtain. Play till rise.

FADE-DOWN CUE: Rise of curtain.

FADE-OUT CUE: ". . . story at a dozen houses."

15. Ready p. 84. Music p. 86.

NEEDLE CUE: ". . . the happiest couple in the country."

SWELL-UP CUE: ". . . rest of my *life!*" Play till rise.

FADE-DOWN CUE: Curtain all the way up.

FADE-OUT CUE: "The thought is distraction to me."

16. Ready p. 92. Music p. 93. Attack must be accurate, for dance.

NEEDLE CUE: "For even *Scandal dies*, if you approve."

SWELL-UP CUE: Immediately after needle starts. Good volume needed on first notes. Play to end of record. Shut off.

### *Curtain plot for A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM:*

(Curtain plots are not always needed. In this case the lights were used as the real curtain, and the act curtain was used to mask the changes. In most cases it was raised and lowered in darkness, on cues called by the prompter to the electrician, by number. Music covered the blackouts; when soft, the curtain had to be slow, to avoid distracting noise.)

#### CURTAIN PLOT—M.S.N.D.

SCENE 1. The Duke's Palace

UP VERY SLOWLY ON SIGNAL FROM DIRECTOR

DOWN MODERATELY FAST AFTER LIGHTS FADE ON

CUE 6

SCENE 2. Quince's Cottage

- UP SLOWLY IN DARKNESS ON SIGNAL FROM DIRECTOR  
DOWN QUICKLY AFTER LIGHT FADES ON CUE 11
- SCENE 3. The Duke's Oak  
UP VERY SLOWLY ON SIGNAL FROM DIRECTOR  
DOWN QUICKLY AFTER LIGHTS FADE ON CUE 19
- SCENE 4. A Bank  
UP FAIRLY QUICKLY ON SIGNAL FROM DIRECTOR  
DOWN QUICKLY AFTER LIGHTS FADE ON CUE 35
- INTERMISSION FIVE MINUTES
- SCENE 5. The Duke's Oak  
UP QUICKLY ON SIGNAL FROM DIRECTOR  
DOWN QUICKLY AS LIGHTS FADE ON CUE 41
- SCENE 6. A Bank  
UP FAIRLY QUICKLY ON SIGNAL FROM DIRECTOR  
DOWN QUICKLY ON LIGHTED STAGE AS PUCK EXITS  
AFTER CUE 53
- INTERMISSION TEN MINUTES
- SCENE 7. A Bank  
UP FAIRLY QUICKLY ON SIGNAL FROM DIRECTOR  
DOWN FAIRLY QUICKLY AS LIGHTS FADE ON CUE 61  
(Wait only ten seconds)
- SCENE 8. A Bank (VERY SHORT SCENE)  
UP FAIRLY QUICKLY ON SIGNAL FROM PROMPTER  
DOWN QUICKLY AFTER LIGHTS FADE ON CUE 64
- SCENE 9. Quince's Cottage  
UP SLOWLY IN DARKNESS ON SIGNAL FROM DIRECTOR  
DOWN QUICKLY AS SOON AS LIGHTS FADE ON CUE 68
- SCENE 10. Duke's Palace  
UP VERY SLOWLY ON SIGNAL FROM DIRECTOR  
DOWN QUICKLY AS PUCK SAYS "SO GOOD NIGHT UNTO  
YOU ALL" AND PUTS OUT HIS FLASHLIGHT

(The light cue sheet for this production covered six pages and contained 82 cues.)

## C. VITRUVIUS ON THE CLASSIC SCENE

(From the *Ten Books of Architecture*, written in the time of Christ, discovered in 1452, published in 1486, and widely read by Renaissance architects. This is the passage that Serlio and others apparently misunderstood, changing the whole course of theatre history. The Latin version may be found in Nicoll's *The Development of the Theatre*, or in the less available original text. A good English translation of Vitruvius is the one by M. H. Morgan [Harvard Press, 1914].)

The scene itself has been arranged in such a way that the middle doors have the ornamentation of a royal palace; to the right and left are the *hospitalia* [believed to mean "guest chambers"]. Following are other spaces provided for ornament, which places the Greeks call *periaktoi*, since machines are in those places, revolving, having three sides, each with a special kind of ornamentation; which, with each change of

action are turned, as the gods enter to the accompaniment of thunder, to change the kind of ornamentation on the face. Following these places are side wings, projecting, which afford entrances to the scene, one from the forum, the other from afar.

The scenes are of three kinds: one which is called tragic, another comic, the third satyric. Of these the schemes of ornamentation are dissimilar and distinct from each other, for the tragic scenes are depicted with columns, pediments, images, and other objects pertaining to kings; the comic scenes show private houses and balconies, with prospects of windows arranged in rows, in the scheme of ordinary dwellings; the satyric scenes are ornamented with trees, caves, mountains and other rustic things depicted in a kind of landscape style.

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